

The Feelings of Jesus' Heart

His Whole Person's Affective Narrative

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Chapter 1 Extrinsic Portraits to Intrinsic Profile

“Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me?”

John 14:9

What is the portrait of Jesus that you have in your faith portfolio? Do you think Jesus would agree with your portrait—and affirm “that’s me and where I am” (as he requires of all his followers in his discipleship paradigm, Jn 12:26)?

Our portrait of Jesus could show different angles of his profile, which he may agree with or not. This is an open question that we need to examine in comparison with how Jesus sees himself. Without knowing a clear answer to the question, the Jesus that Christians portray in their faith, gospel and discipleship is often formed from assumptions, and therefore likely incomplete, distorted or misleading. The consequence of having such a biased lens portraying Jesus has reverberated through the global church to effectively bear false witness to who, what and how Jesus was, is and will be. Given this existential reality, is it surprising to hear Jesus still say to his disciples today, “Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me?”?

I grew up in a Christian home in a Chicago (USA) neighborhood, which had a surrounding majority of Catholics (including DePaul University and a Catholic hospital). The main portraits I saw of Jesus portrayed him in a manger and visibly on the cross. Later, when I became a true Christian and engaged in formal theological education, I added multiple angles of Jesus’ profile to my faith portfolio. For years, however, the intrinsic profile of his whole person eluded me, as if I was in a theological fog. Not surprisingly, this fog permeates churches and the academy to cloud the lenses used to see Jesus—blurred lenses which perceive a biased profile of Jesus that focuses mainly on extrinsic portraits (e.g., what he said, did, taught). How does such a portrait evolve?

Photoshop

For most Christians, the incarnation is not an issue even though they only have mental photos of Jesus: *who* Jesus is the one embodying God in the body of a human

male. Yet, for most Christians, *what* Jesus embodied as a human male usually does not encompass his whole person—that is, the *what* distinguished only by the heart of his person from inner out. Portraits alone of *who* Jesus is can never capture the *what* of his whole person, no matter how much his portrait is touched up or enhanced as has evolved in ecclesial and academic contexts—in effect, duplicating the common work of Photoshop.

The unavoidable issue facing all Christians in their portraits of Jesus is this:

Without knowing and understanding his person, we only have information about Jesus from outer in that depict extrinsic portraits; and having this knowledge (no matter how much) of Jesus doesn't result in the existential reality of truly knowing *him*, his whole person.

Such fragmentary knowledge was merely the quantity of information his first disciples had of him (disappointing his heart, Jn 14:9); this signifies the boasts of many church leaders and academics today (cf. Jer 9:23-24). And since many of his servants (past and present) essentially utilize what amounts to a Christological Photoshop, “where I am” is not distinguished in their theology and practice for them to “follow my person” nonnegotiablely, and thereby “be also with their person” irreducibly—definitive discipleship with nothing less and no substitutes.

In other words, according to the Word, the portrait that most Christians have of Jesus is not the full profile of who and what he embodied and *how* he enacted that person in daily function. The dominant portrait that Christians have in their portfolios is of Jesus depicted triumphant on the cross—his crucifixion outcome. Beyond that, Christians possess various portraits of Jesus from diverse interpretations of the Word, which amount to partial, indirect or distorted snapshots of his profile. In order to have the full profile of Jesus' whole person, we have to return to the Word and listen carefully (as in Lk 8:18; Mk 4:24), and thereby vulnerably embrace who and what he embodied and how he enacted that person vulnerably from his heart in our presence, and thus was relationally involved as the full profile of the face of God (as Paul distinguished, 2 Cor 4:6).

This study seeks to recount the narrative of Jesus, whose affects vulnerably reveal the heart of his whole person. To pay attention and listen carefully, however, requires us to suspend our current bias that effectively speaks for Jesus, in order to allow him to speak for himself. As we respond to the Word accordingly, his intrinsic profile will emerge and unfold for us to indeed “follow my person and be where I am in relationship together”—with the relational outcome that unequivocally “knows me, my whole person,” portrayed with nothing less and no substitutes.

Transitioning to Jesus' Intrinsic Profile

All Christians have some type of bias that limits Jesus from fully being himself, and that constrains his person from having all the affects of his heart. These limits and constraints represent the “old” in us, which needs to be redeemed so that the “new” can arise in our theology and practice as followers of the heart of Jesus' whole person.

Therefore, as the affective narrative of Jesus unfolds, we also need to be reconsidering the following:

1. In your photo album you have from the Word, what is the profile that emerges to define your knowledge and determine your understanding of Jesus?
2. How completely do you think that profile encompasses who, what and how he was?
3. Most important in all this, how vulnerably do you effectively fathom his heartbeat for both face-to-face and heart-to-heart relationship together?

This is crucial to examine, because after all this time we don't want to find ourselves like the disciples who “don't you know me?” and didn't understand why.

The Gospel narratives provide all the essential accounts and necessary details of Jesus' earthly life for anyone to know who and how he was. Less explicitly noted, however, are further expressions of Jesus' person that help complete his profile of *what* he was also. This is the inner-out intrinsic profile of his whole person, which is often overlooked by Christians with the consequence of integrally not knowing Jesus and not being like him as a person. That's why we need to return to the narratives of Jesus to rediscover the intrinsic profile of his whole person, in whom was clearly distinguished “the image of God” (Col 1:15) for his followers to “follow me” and to be “where I am” in his very likeness.

The affects that Jesus experienced in his heart (not just his mind) are essential to his whole person. These affects are not about merely the human dynamics of what Jesus was. His feelings are integral to the emotions of God, which ongoingly have been shared openly in Scripture for the sake of God's people, and now are further and more deeply expressed distinctly by the heart of the embodied Word enacted vulnerably with his person. God's emotions are simply essential to distinguish God beyond merely as the Object of our beliefs. When God's emotions are overlooked, ignored or even discounted, God then is reduced from being the Subject whose overt ontology is vulnerably present and actively (as Subject) involved directly in relationship with us. The complete profile of the whole of God doesn't emerge and unfold whenever God is related to as Object, no matter how venerable the profile.

A significant introduction to the emotions of God is compiled by David Lamb, who rightfully outlines the scope of God’s emotions by giving equal attention to the negative emotions of God’s hatred, wrath and anger.¹ Yet, the weight given to God’s harder feelings doesn’t imbalance God’s love, rather it keeps it from being distorted, for example, by idealizing or romanticizing it. In contrast, most Christians usually tip the emotions scale in favor of God’s love, whereby the profile of God is distorted to fit a portrait framed by our biases and assumptions. Nevertheless, the incarnation of the Word reveals the affective narrative that vulnerably discloses: (1) the heart of the whole of God, and (2) the heart of God’s image and likeness by which human persons are created and now transformed in the new creation—with nothing less and no substitutes (2 Cor 3:18; 5:17).

Therefore, the transition to Jesus’ intrinsic profile is neither optional nor negotiable with anything less and any substitutes. Yet, with the diversity of Christian witness characterized today with anything less and any substitutes, global Christianity is at a crossroads for the integrity of its identity and function as the followers of Jesus. At this pivotal stage of Christian faith, Jesus’ followers need to understand his affective narrative, so that—no matter the surrounding context—we can unequivocally “be where I am” (Jn 12:26) and thereby make heart-to-heart relational connection in order to intimately know nothing less than and no substitutes for his whole person from inner out.

Be on the ongoing alert, however, because this irreducible and nonnegotiable profile of Jesus emerges only on his relational terms for this relational process and outcome in ongoing reciprocal relationship together; and to reemphasize, the integrity of our involvement in this relationship can neither be reduced to nor negotiated by our terms (no matter how committed). Peter especially learned this experiential truth and relational reality the hard way, with relational repercussions that resonated in Jesus’ heart and reverberated in the early church.

From the beginning, Jesus experienced the issue, the defining issue, that he ongoingly encountered others having only a partial portrait of him—profiles often distorted or misinformed. So, not surprisingly even the early disciples’ incomplete profile of Jesus prevailed, because they didn’t listen carefully to his feelings and slow down (or simply stop) to embrace his whole person affected vulnerably before him. Compare Luke 24:6-11, for example; whose words were listened to?

Likewise, these are issues for Christians today, those who in daily practice are in essence on auto-pilot about Jesus’ profile—not slowing down or stopping their trajectory to be aware of *who* they’re following and *where* he is. Consequently, there isn’t a distinct consciousness that distinguishes Jesus’ whole person but only the image of his profile from the biases of Christian lenses. Moreover, this existential reality has evolved to the

¹ David T. Lamb, *The Emotions of God: Making Sense of a God Who Hates, Weeps and Loves* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2022).

stage that we become preoccupied with the secondary matters surrounding us, in which our profile of Jesus emerges often as if generated by AI. Such a profile, at best, only portrays the data feed into our version of AI, whereby our auto-pilot becomes a simulation of the epistemological illusion of Jesus from the virtual limits of AI.

We are now challenged—if not confronted—to enter into the affective narrative of Jesus' intrinsic profile. To connect with Jesus' person (not just his words and actions) as we navigate this narrative, we also need to make our person vulnerable in order to be involved with the heart of his whole person. The Spirit is present and involved to help us in this heart-to-heart involvement.

Chapter 2

His Beginnings

**In the beginning was the Word.... No one has ever seen God.
It is the only Son, himself God, who is close to the Father's heart,
who has made him known.**

John 1:1,18

Since many have undertaken to compile a narrative of Jesus, it also seemed good to me to write an *affective* account...that you may know *the wholeness* of the things you have been taught.¹

And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us—that is, *embodied* and *relationally involved*. He was in the world, and yet the world did not recognize him. He came to his own people, who also did not receive him.

Even though Jesus may have anticipated this rejection, he was still affected by it because he is relational by the nature of God's being. His hurt and pain will unfold throughout his narrative and reach its climax on the cross in relation to the Father (Mt 27:16). Often, we will witness him feeling alone among others, including in the company of his disciples. His feelings bring out his heart, which are at the core of knowing his person.

The incarnation narrative begins with Jesus in the womb of Mary, who was pregnant from the Holy Spirit. Joseph and Mary travel from Nazareth to Bethlehem to be registered. This journey is about 70 miles, which certainly must have taken its toll on Mary. Likely riding on a donkey, her late-stage pregnancy also must have strained Jesus. At that stage of biological development, Jesus is affected in some way, with consciousness of discomfort. Perhaps this gives him a foretaste of how “the narrow way” could be bumpy and uncomfortable for those following “where I am.”

When they arrive in Bethlehem, they are housed in a stable because there is no guest room available for them. There Jesus is born and placed in a feeding trough among

¹ These paraphrased words from Luke, who wrote his Gospel for all peoples to be equal, set the tone for the following narrative. However, this affective narrative is not always in chronological order. Just as John's Gospel penetrated deeper into Jesus' chronological life, this narrative magnifies what's primary for Jesus and thus what's important to understand the heart of his whole person. This is critical to keep in focus throughout this study.

other animals. How Jesus is affected by such conditions is unclear, but surely he smells unpleasant aromas. And the extent of his crying is not recorded, which should not be assumed as Jesus lacking awareness of his surroundings.

In the same region, shepherds see a vision and hear the good news of a Savior born for them. They rush off to find baby Jesus lying in the feeding trough. The disparity between what they heard and the conditions they see might raise questions and doubts about this baby as their Savior, on the one hand. On the other hand, the good news is manifested in Jesus' profile, whose person is not unaware of their attention; and the significant affect he communicates non-verbally to them gives them the assurance of the gospel embodied in his person.

After Jesus was circumcised, he is brought to the temple to be designated as holy. There in the temple is a man named Simeon looking for the Lord's Messiah. Seeing the child Jesus, Simeon knows immediately God's salvation has come. He also correctly predicts: "Indeed, this child is destined to cause the fall and rise of many in Israel and to be a sign that will be opposed, so that the thoughts and feelings of many hearts will be revealed." As Jesus listens to Simeon's prediction, he likely has mixed feelings, because he knows that the gospel he embodies is composed integrally with bad news as well as good news.

The gospel can become very elusive for human hearts when what is claimed is skewed by good news. That is to say, the gospel is ambiguous, distorted or misleading when it is composed with only good news. In Jesus' gospel, the good news is predicated on the bad news that his gospel provides the means to bring redemptive change for. To ignore, deny or minimize the bad news directly revises the good news with misinformation, whereby those who claim and even proclaim this gospel are not congruent with his gospel.

Meanwhile, King Herod was deeply disturbed by the threatening news of the new born Jesus. Wise men from the east arrive in Jerusalem in search of Jesus after they saw his star rising. That star leads them to the place where the child is. They are overwhelmed with joy and fall on their knees to worship him. This must be a lot for Jesus to absorb, and we can easily imagine a big smile on his face.

Herod expected the wise men to report the child's location to him. But they are warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, so they return to their own country by another route. After they were gone, an angel of the Lord appears to Joseph in a dream to escape to Egypt, because Herod wants to kill the child. Again, Jesus hears some chilling news that, on the one hand, is simply part of his gospel's bad news and, on the other hand, still stirs anxious affect even in Jesus' heart. Such feelings should not be discounted, and they can only be denied by dismissing the person at the depth of his heart. It's not clear how Joseph and Mary support Jesus' person and cared for his heart. We catch a glimpse of this when they return from Egypt after Herod's death.

They settled in Nazareth where Jesus grows up and would be called a Nazarene. The boy grows up and becomes strong, filled with wisdom. Since he wasn't born a ready-made Messiah, his development unfolds stepwise. We can only speculate about the experiences he had that were instrumental in his development. Along with God's grace on him, his person certainly was conscious of and affected by those experiences, notably the relational interactions that affected his heart. One experience is highlighted that gets us to the heart of his identity and function, even at age 12.

Every year his parents traveled to Jerusalem for the Passover Festival. The year when he is twelve years old, Jesus goes to the temple by himself to sit among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. Jesus demonstrates how attentive he is even at that age; and all who hear him are amazed at his understanding and his answers. The boy may have an exceptional brain, but his heart is the real key distinguishing his person.

After a mix-up, his parents realize that their boy isn't traveling back to Nazareth with their group. They discover him back at the temple; and Mary confronts him with their anxiety "searching for you." With the resolve of a mature adult, the boy states unequivocally: "Why were you searching for me? Didn't you know that it was necessary for me to be in my Father's house?"

At this early stage of his earthly life, without apology and timidity Jesus clearly reveals his full identity and his whole function, both of which would be contrary to his sociocultural context. Since the boy's parents do not understand what he said to them, he surely experiences some frustration with where they are in their own lives. Given what an angel communicated to Mary and Joseph, his bewilderment about them not recognizing his full identity and affirming his whole function should not be surprising to anyone, but is understandable for his person and expected in his heart. Such feelings would be the natural affect of a person who doesn't cover up one's heart but lives vulnerably. Accordingly, in the next eighteen or so years of his life, Jesus increases in wisdom and stature, and, most importantly, in favor with God and with others.

It is common to pay little attention to the earliest years of Jesus' earthly life, because little is recorded about it. Yet, it is important to consider what could have happened in order to become aware of his affect as a person, so that we will be sensitive to the feelings of his heart. This will be helpful (1) to "follow my person and be where I am" (Jn 12:26), and (2) to be like him in our own person, notably since he embodied the image of God (Col 1:15) in which our persons are created. Moreover, we need to realize that Jesus' life was not on a chronological clock. He doesn't live by the quantitative order of *chronos* but rather on the qualitative basis of *kairos*, which indicates the season and opportunities enacted by his person.² *Kairos* will be more apparent later as the qualitative framework

² Hebrew and Greek word studies used in this study are taken from the following sources: Horst Balz,

for his embodied function. Thus, only his affective narrative will provide us with a complete profile of his person.

When Jesus is about thirty years old, he came from Nazareth and is baptized in the Jordan by John. As soon as he comes up out of the water, the whole of God emerges to distinguish the triunity of their persons: the Spirit descends on him and the Father declares “You are my beloved Son, with you I am well-pleased.” No doubt, Jesus’ feelings about their convergence are ineffable. With his heart stirring, Jesus began his public ministry at this juncture. Then he leaves the Jordan in ongoing relational interaction with the Spirit, who leads him into the wilderness for forty days to be tempted by Satan.

The encounter that Jesus had with Satan should not be diminished simply as an initiation routine to preface his ministry. Thus, Jesus doesn’t go through the motions during his temptations by Satan, nor is he engaged just matter of factly to resist Satan. He is hungry from not eating for forty days, so he certainly is affected by his circumstances that Satan uses to influence him. Satan’s influence often revolves on his shaping persons to be distracted or controlled by situations and circumstances, which subtly prevails among us to give priority to secondary matters over what’s primary to God—a nonnegotiable primacy. And even though Jesus is single-minded in his purpose, the ambiguous scenario Satan further offers to him requires the resolve of his whole person for his heart not to be divided from the primary by secondary measures, which involves becoming separated from God’s primacy of relationship together. As the subtlety of Satan’s efforts escalates, Jesus has to fight back with an intensity that will not succumb to Satan’s counter-relational workings, or render Jesus to misuse or even abuse his relationship with the Father. With his whole person on the line, Jesus’s vulnerable heart neither fails him nor disappoints the Father.

Critically then, Jesus’ trials introduce for his followers the inevitable counter-relational dynamics of sin and its reductionism that all will encounter. Therefore, indeed, Jesus’ affects bring out the heart of his whole person, by which his identity is defined and his function is determined. The decisiveness of his feelings allow for nothing less and no substitutes, which is the distinguishing quality of his ministry.

Gerhard Schreider, eds., *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990); Colin Brown, ed., *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975); R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr., Bruce Waitke, eds., *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, 2 vols. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980); Ernst Jenni, Claus Westermann, *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*, trans. Mark E. Biddle, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1997); Gerhard Kittel, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 10 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974); Harold K. Moulton, ed., *The Analytical Greek Lexicon Revised* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978); W.E. Vine, *Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1981); Spiros Zodhiates, ed., *Hebrew-Greek Key Word Study Bible* (Chattanooga: AMG Publ., 1996).

The person Jesus presents vulnerably throughout the incarnation is constituted by the principle of ‘nothing less and no substitutes’. The *incarnation principle of nothing less and no substitutes* functionally involves both of the following:

1. Engaging the human context without losing the primary identity of *who* you are and *whose* you are.
2. Participating, involving, partaking in situations and relationships without losing your priorities of *what* you are and therefore by nature *how* you are called to be.

With the affect of a Subject in full consciousness—not an Object on auto-pilot—Jesus maintains in whole ontology and function the integrity of who, what and how he is, ongoingly without reduction or redefinition, therefore always with nothing less and no substitutes.

The next day John the Baptist is standing with two of his disciples. As he sees Jesus passing by, he says, “Look, the Lamb of God.” When the two disciples hear him say this, they follow Jesus. Then Jesus turns and notices them, so he opens the way for them to make connection by initiating the conversation with the direct question, “What are you looking for?”

This starts the relational process of Jesus bringing together his own disciples, who will follow him in his relational context but do not yet vulnerably engage him in his relational process. That depth level requires heart-to-heart relational involvement in reciprocal relationship together, which does not unfold until much later in their sojourn. Nevertheless, Jesus makes unequivocal calls to them for discipleship, which opens the door to many occasions when Jesus will be negatively affected by them. This relational process is critical to understand as it unfolds, in order to know the heart of his whole person.

It seems more accurate to perceive Jesus’ affect in this relational process as warmly communicating to potential followers, rather than him forcefully expressing the imperative to “follow me.” In his initial call, one person in particular seems to affect him positively the most. As Andrew tells Simon about finding the Messiah, and Philip tells Nathanael, their preconception of the Messiah doesn’t coincide with whom Jesus embodied. With this biased lens, Nathanael is openly skeptical about their findings, which makes Nathanael vulnerable before Jesus. His honesty impacts Jesus deeply, who says as Nathanael surveys him, “Here truly is an Israelite in whom there is no deceit.” Jesus’ heart is moved, because Nathanael vulnerability is what Jesus expects from his followers—without which there is no heart-to-heart relational involvement together. Only this vulnerable relational involvement defines the intimate relational process of discipleship.

What evolves at this stage for his disciples, however, is neither vulnerable nor relational; and this will deeply hurt Jesus and cause him pain and anger. Turn-around changes are in the forecast ahead, not to mention the resonance of his wake-up calls that would penetrate their hearts.

Jesus didn't start a discipleship experiment to see how far persons are willing to extend their faith. Yet, the existential reality is that down through church history discipleship has been engaged like an experiment. For Jesus, discipleship is the nonnegotiable relational process that brings together the core for the relational outcome of what forms the heart of his church family. These disciples are nonnegotiable in his likeness, and their family together as church is irreducibly in likeness of the Trinity—definitively as Jesus will pray near the end of his affective narrative. Certainly then, redemptive changes of the *old* dying so the *new* will rise need to become the relational reality in order for this relational outcome to emerge—the redemptive change in his trajectory that Jesus unfolds unavoidably with nothing less and no substitutes. His followers cannot appeal to anything less or any substitutes, yet this is how discipleship has evolved to render Christian witness to the influence and shaping of sin as reductionism. This is why Jesus earlier established the essential model to rigorously fight against Satan's counter-relational workings, so that reductionism will not pervade his followers' identity and function. This portrait is the *only* Jesus in full profile: the whole of who, what and how that the Word integrally embodied and enacted throughout his affective narrative.

From the outset, Jesus' ministry is distinguished by making direct connection with people, either to build relationships or to expose the bad news keeping relationships apart. As God determined from the beginning of creation, "it is not good for human persons to be apart" (Gen 2:18). The gospel Jesus embodies and enacts integrally with good and bad news now unfolds in relational response to this human relational condition.

This is indicated even in Jesus' involvement in sociocultural events. At a wedding in Cana of Galilee, Jesus and his disciples are invited guests along with his mother. When the wine runs out, Jesus' mother directs him to do something about it. Perhaps annoyed by her turning his attention away from the primary to prioritize a secondary matter, Jesus replies to her, "What has this concern of yours to do with me, woman? The time of my purpose is not to be occupied by the secondary." Nevertheless, she directs the other workers to "do whatever he tells you." (Human offspring can readily identify with Jesus' feelings about the expectations of parents.) Rather than pursue the issue with his mother that affects him, Jesus uses this situation as an opportunity to communicate to his disciples more of who and what he was. As a result, they further believe in him, though they still don't grasp his full identity and whole function.

Later, Jesus goes up to Jerusalem because the Jewish Passover is near. A defining scene unfolds at the temple. (In his Gospel, John records this scene here, which the other Gospels record later chronologically, in order to make emphatic the distinguishing purpose of Jesus' ministry. This scene highlights **the strategic shift** in God's trajectory, which unfolds distinctly as Jesus' narrative continues.) The temple is reduced to a place of business that amplifies the economic inequality among God's people. This injustice contradicts the just and righteous integrity of God, whereby God's intimate relational context cannot function as the relational connection *all* peoples can make with God. Jesus' overtly aggressive response to the perpetrators of this injustice demonstrates the affect of his whole person. The feelings of his heart are not a reaction to the situation, rather he responds with the affective anger necessary to fight against the counter-relational workings of reductionism in order for such bad news to be redeemed for the good news to emerge.

When Jesus encounters strong pushback to explain the basis for his angry actions, he doesn't justify his just-and-righteous end with the use of violence. (Now would you expect Jesus to have more restraint with his anger?) On the contrary, anger has two sides, one negative and the other positive. Both engage in aggressive behavior and/or speech, one to fragment and the other to make whole. The latter distinguishes the gospel Jesus enacts, while the former reflects those needing his gospel. And the only way they can claim his gospel is to be set free from their ways such as seen at the temple. With such bad news prevailing in their midst, many believe in his name when they see the signs Jesus does. Jesus, however, is not impressed and thus will not be involved with them until deep level changes occur in them.

In other words, since Jesus isn't seeking attention and acclaim, he will not embrace just anyone as his disciples merely because they follow him around. He only wants followers who will reciprocate in relationship together with the vulnerable involvement of the heart of their person. Again, nothing less and no substitutes, which then would require them to claim both the bad news and good news of his gospel.

This turn-around faith distinguishing those who truly belong to God's family is further clarified by Jesus in a clandestine interaction with a Pharisee named Nicodemus. Even though this Pharisee pursues Jesus for a positive purpose, Jesus is clearly disturbed by Nicodemus' biased lens. As a ruler of the Jews who teaches Israel about faith, Jesus has to correct him about his views that merely focus on life from outer in; he has no understanding of the whole person from inner out, whose born-again transformation is the only basis for belonging to God's family in eternal relationship together. No doubt, this must shake Nicodemus to the core and challenge him as never before. What Jesus shares vulnerably in his interactions always reveals the light, which then always exposes and confronts the darkness—notably those in a theological fog or with a blurred vision—even in those of faith with good intentions.

After this, Jesus and his disciples go to the Judean countryside, where he spends quality time with them and baptizes. When Jesus learns that the Pharisees have heard he is making and baptizing more disciples than John, he leaves Judea and withdraws into Galilee upon sadly hearing the expected news of John's arrest. With greater resolve, Jesus returns to Galilee proclaiming his gospel in the power of the Spirit. The narrative of his beginnings are marked with feelings going up and down, affecting him both positively and negatively, which he always lets his heart vulnerably experience in order not to limit or constrain his person. This becomes even more evident as his trajectories unfold.

Before we move into his trajectories, however, there is one incident, which occurs in his main narrative, that would be helpful to mention now to serve as a transition between his beginnings and his trajectories. This incident involves his biological family, and by Jesus' nature it extends the incident between his parents and him at age twelve in the temple. In the later incident, his family has become concerned about Jesus and all the turmoil he creates in the Jewish community. They want to put a halt to this unrest he is causing before a tragedy occurred. So, they pursue him to put limits and constraints on him to prevent this harmful end. There is no question that his biological brothers have doubts about him, which Jesus is well aware of and seemed to be unaffected by. Yet, his mother joining them to basically shut him down is very hurtful for Jesus to experience—especially after all she has witnessed throughout those years. Though Jesus doesn't express his feelings as he did at age twelve, we can be sure that his heart is affected. That's the nature of his and any person living from inner out.

In spite of Jesus' feelings, he is not distracted by secondary matters and remains committed to his primary purpose. His wholehearted commitment to what's primary to God is irreplaceable for ongoingly affirming his full identity and whole function. Therefore, when his biological family finds him and wants to speak to him, Jesus makes this irrevocable statement and unequivocal affirmation: "Who is my mother and who are my brothers?" Pointing toward his disciples, those who listen and practice the word of God, he adds, "Here are my mother and my brothers. For whoever enacts the will of my Father in heaven is my brothers, and sisters, and mother."

His trajectories, on this illuminated relational basis, will now embody, enact and fulfill "the will of my Father" in order for the relational outcome of his family to belong together as one in God's triunity likeness.

Chapter 3

His Trajectories

“I, the one speaking to you, am he.”

John 4:26

**“This way you will know and understand that
the Father is in me and I in the Father.”**

John 10:38

**“I am in them and you are in me,
so that they may be made completely one....”**

John 17:23

When Jesus leaves Judea and goes to Galilee, he has to travel through Samaria. So, he comes to a town in Samaria called Sychar near the property that Jacob had given his son Joseph. Jacob’s well was there, and Jesus sits down at the well around noon, because he is worn out from his journey. He is alone in his weariness since his disciples have gone into town to buy food.

In spite of how he is affected, he is not in a desperate physical state. His thirst, however, is urgent, and his palpable need opens up a unique (read uncommon) opportunity to make a deep relational connection, which would constitute the strategic shift in God’s trajectory of covenant relationship.

The Strategic Shift of God’s Trajectory

Jesus vulnerably initiates relation involvement with a Samaritan woman that counters the prevailing religious and cultural norms. She likely is suspicious of his intentions; and given her marital history, she is even ostracized by other Samaritan women and thus came to draw water alone at midday. So, she openly raises the question, “How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me?” (For Jews don’t associate with Samaritans.)

This curious interaction is not an accidental encounter that happens by chance. In his designed purpose, Jesus feels strongly in his resolve to enact his function set apart from the existing *common*, which distinctly embodies his *uncommon* (read holy) identity.

He opens his heart to this marginalized woman, and she responds vulnerably to complete this relational connection heart to heart. The relational outcome is an equalized relational process without stratification, which determines the involvement for anyone desiring to worship God in covenant relationship. “This time has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the only persons the Father seeks to be involved in relationship together heart to heart.”

Taking this all in, the woman shares with Jesus her belief: “I know that the Messiah is coming to fulfill this.” Without hesitation, Jesus responds with warm assurance for her: “I, who speak vulnerably to you, am he—the one you and others have been waiting for.” With this direct revelation, the strategic shift of God’s trajectory in response to all persons, peoples, tribes, nations and languages becomes the experiential truth and relational reality for persons like her to respond to. She excitedly claims Jesus’ gospel for herself, and then she goes back to her people to proclaim what Jesus intimately revealed. As a result of her witness, many in that town believe in Jesus, and many more believe in him because of making further connection with him to listen to his words directly.

The strategic shift of God’s trajectory enacted by Jesus involves a qualitative relational process. Thus, listening to his words is not the same as merely hearing his words, because the former requires vulnerable involvement in the qualitative relational process with Jesus, while the latter engages just a quantitative means to gain information about him. The latter is analogous today to using an AI app like ChatGPT to compose his words with all the information we want. However accurately the quantity of his words comprise an extrinsic portrait of Jesus for us, its words use a different language from Jesus’ relational language, which prevents the relational connection necessary to know his person and understand his heart. Consequently, the profiles from such apps can never duplicate the experiential truth and relational reality of the heart of Jesus’ whole person to have relationship with together, just as the Samaritan woman’s relational progression does. Moreover, even if AI develops sentience, it will never be capable of composing the qualitative feelings of Jesus, but at best merely a simulated depiction. Yet, these are the consequences, relational consequences, that many Christians experience just hearing the words of Jesus, thus who have illusions of faith in a simulated Jesus that puts them on a different trajectory than the embodied Word’s. The consequence of such faith always affects Jesus relationally, causing feelings of hurt, pain, sadness, frustration and anger, which he will express throughout the incarnation and into post-ascension (notably Rev 2-3). Like the Father, these are not the type of followers he seeks, therefore it is essential to know and understand the heart of his person to truly be his disciples.

As Jesus’ pivotal interaction with the Samaritan woman is ending, his disciples return with food and are shocked that he is talking with her. Yet, as they will typically do,

no one shares their feelings with him. Instead of openly pursuing what's primary, they stay at relational distance by acting on the secondary, and thus keep urging him to eat something. In spite of physically being worn out, he clarifies and corrects them about what is primary. Then he redirects their focus to the joint mission of his true disciples to gather together the fruit of their relational work that plants, sows and reaps his gospel—just as signified in his revealing to the Samaritan woman the strategic shift of God's trajectory in response to the human condition. Underlying this relational process of what's primary, Jesus' trajectory will unfold further and even deeper. And as it unfolds, his feelings will never diminish because of his physical condition. Indeed, his feelings will intensify as his trajectory deepens to further reveal its significance to the heart of God.

After his significant time in Samaria, he leaves there for Galilee. In anticipation of what will soon be his experience, Jesus testifies that a prophet has no honor in his own country. This will have some effect on him but definitely not define his identity and determine his function. Until then news about him spreads throughout the entire vicinity. The Galileans welcome him because they have seen everything he did in Jerusalem during the festival. He proclaims without moderation that "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news." He also teaches in their synagogues and is praised by everyone.

He goes again to Cana in Galilee, where he earlier turned water into wine. A royal official has an ill son at Capernaum. When this man hears that Jesus has come into Galilee, he pursues Jesus and pleads with him to come down and heal his son, since he is about to die. Jesus tells him frankly with mixed feelings, "Unless you people see signs and wonders, you will not believe." He has a disdain for such faith, but he also feels compassion for the man's sad situation. The official persists with Jesus to "come down before my boy dies." Jesus responds in his compassion and tells him, "Go, your son will live." The official takes Jesus at his word and goes home to discover that it happened just as Jesus said. So, he and his whole household entrust themselves to Jesus. This signifies Jesus' second sign that deepens his trajectory with these relational connections.

Then he goes back to Nazareth, where he was brought up. As usual, he enters the synagogue on the Sabbath and stands up to read. The scroll of the prophet Isaiah is given to him, and he reads with conviction from Isaiah 61:1-2. As everyone in the synagogue is focused on him, he says with even greater conviction, "Today as you listen, this Scripture has been fulfilled."

They are all speaking well of him, on the one hand, and are amazed by the gracious words that come from his mouth. Yet, on the other hand, they say with skepticism, "Isn't this Joseph's son?" No doubt they want visible proof of Jesus' significance as he enacted in Capernaum. Their bias, however, already precludes their embracing Jesus in his full identity, and limits their acceptance of him to merely another hometown boy.

Jesus has already alluded to their rejection of him. Given this reality, Jesus further reveals that God's purpose for his prophets is not shaped, defined or determined by the wishes, desires or even needs of the local population. When they hear this, everyone in the synagogue becomes enraged and they forcefully drive him out of town to kill him. But Jesus eludes them and simply goes on his way, without the anxiety of escaping as would be expected. Yet, even though he expected to be rejected by his hometown, this experience has some effect on his heart. And he always let his heart be affected.

After his abrupt departure from Nazareth, Jesus goes to live in Capernaum by the sea, which fulfills further the words from the prophet Isaiah (Isa 9:1-2). A crowd pursues him as he walks along the Sea of Galilee. He sees two boats at the edge of the lake; the fishermen had left them and are washing their nets. So, he takes this opportunity to get into one of the boats, which belongs to Simon, and asks him to go out a little further from the land. Then he sits down and is teaching the crowds from the boat. But Jesus also has a deeper purpose for this opportunity.

When he finishes speaking to the crowd, he says confidently to Simon Peter, "Go out into deep water and let down your nets for a catch." Peter replies skeptically, "Master, we've worked hard all night long and caught nothing. But if you say so, I'll let down the nets." When Simon and his brother Andrew do this, they catch so great amount of fish that their nets begin to tear. So, they call to their partners (James and his brother John) in the other boat to help them. Then they fill both boats so full of fish that they begin to sink. This experience penetrates Simon Peter's heart, and he falls at Jesus' knees saying, "Go away from me because I'm a sinful man, Lord." Jesus tells Peter tenderly, "Don't be afraid. From now on you will be catching people." Jesus uses this opportunity for his deeper purpose, and with undeniable conviction he calls Simon, Andrew, James and John to "follow my person in relationship together." At this pivotal juncture, they let go of their common identity and function to follow him—with a new identity and function, though not without issues and problems.

Together they go into Capernaum, and immediately Jesus enters the synagogue on the Sabbath in order to teach. With the depth of his feelings clearly revealed non-verbally, those present are astonished at his teaching. Why? Because he is teaching them in qualitative-relational terms as one who has authority, and not quantitatively like the scribes. This is indicative of the redemptive change that Jesus is constituting. Later, he will confront such teachers with the common issue, "Why is my language not clear to you?"

<p>Theological education and its teachers need to take to heart the heart of Jesus' person. The difference and contrast in the two teachings described above continue to exist today in churches and the related academy. Teachers in the latter mode mainly transmit information <i>about</i> God without its qualitative-relational depth; this is notably propagated</p>

in Western contexts, with its influence pervading the global community. Those like Jesus communicate the words *of* God for relationship together. Their respective authoritative basis is grounded in either referential language or God's relational language, with quantitative terms or qualitative-relational terms. And the former's biased lens has strained the global church under the West's influence. Even though the former may reverberate in the minds of those who hear such information about God, only the latter resonates in the hearts of those listening to the words of God communicated for relationship together. Jesus' first disciples had to learn this difference the hard way, and Christians need to learn from their discipleship experience. And what we need to learn is that making this change requires more than a paradigm shift. This is a turn-around change necessitating the redemptive change that Jesus brings distinguishing God's strategic shift. Anything less and any substitutes reinforce and sustain the status quo.

Jesus is consciously aware that the premier adversary of redemptive change being constituted in his followers is Satan. He is always on the alert for Satan and his cohorts' blatantly overt actions, but also of their subtly covert influence. As Satan indicated after tempting Jesus, he always looks for other opportunities to assert his counter-relational work. In the synagogue, for example, a man is there with an unclean demonic spirit who cries out with a loud voice: "Leave us alone! What do you have to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!" Indeed, the Uncommon One is clearly distinguished embodied among the common. But Jesus rebukes him and says, "Be silent and come out of him." And the unclean spirit throws the man into convulsions, shouts with a loud voice, and comes out of him.

The decisive assertion of Jesus' actions amazes all who are present. And they say to each other bewildered: "What is this message? A new teaching with authority and power unseen before! For he commands the unclean spirits and they obey him." So, news about him begins to spread throughout the entire vicinity of Galilee. Such reports, however, have yet to grasp the gospel Jesus is enacting.

Perhaps you wonder at different times in Jesus' narrative, why does he not want various ones who have been positively affected by his actions to say who he is and what he has enacted? Jesus is on a trajectory that others could observe or experience in some way. Yet, any testimony about him is incomplete when merely composed by information about him. Information alone cannot witness to the experiential truth and relational reality of his trajectory, which he does not want others to perceive on a tangent from God's relational context that he embodies and God's relational process that he enacts. In other words, his trajectories can only be distinguished in wholeness, the qualitative-relational nature of which can only be experienced and thus be testified to by those vulnerably involved directly in reciprocal relationship together with him. As will unfold in his

narrative, these are the only witnesses whom he entrusts to extend his trajectory in the world. Those who experience only healing, cleansing or related actions have only an insufficient basis to be his witnesses. Likewise, if Jesus were incarnate today in the modern world, in contrast and conflict with the Web 2.0 paradigm he would not allow the internet's global structure to determine his trajectory, nor would he utilize the social media platform to proclaim his gospel. And he wouldn't text his feelings using emojis. Christians need to pay deeper attention to his affective narrative and understand the heart of his whole person, because what prevails today only simulates belonging and creates illusions of relationships.

After Jesus leaves the synagogue, he goes into Simon and Andrew's house with James and John. Simon's mother-in-law was suffering from a high fever, and they ask him about her. So, he goes to her, takes her gently by the hand, and raises her up. The fever leaves her, and she begins to serve them as if she were never sick. When evening comes, many others who are sick and demon-possessed are brought to him. He heals many with various diseases and drives out many demons, so that what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah is fulfilled: "He himself took our weaknesses and carried our diseases" (Isa 53:4). Thus, God's trajectory keeps unfolding as the experiential truth and relational reality.

Very early in the morning, while it is still dark, Jesus gets up and makes his way to a deserted place. This is always a special time for him to communicate intimately in his relationship with the Father; and Jesus is always more passionate about this than any other time or matter. In the primacy of relationship, he never allows anything else to have a greater priority. That's why his heart is not fragmented by others or diluted by situations.

This raises the inescapable issue for Christians and the global church today:

What priorities define our identity and determine our function, as we profess a faith that assumes to follow Jesus? What exactly about him do we claim to follow, and does this profile presume to distinguish the person of Jesus?

This issue is never-ending in Jesus' narrative, and it still continues among us, past, present and future.

Meanwhile, Simon and his companions search for Jesus, and when they find him they say, "Everyone is looking for you." When the crowds also find him, they try to keep him from leaving them. But he clarifies for them with uncompromising resolve: "It is necessary for me to proclaim my gospel about the kingdom of God to the other towns

also, because I am sent for this purpose. This is why I have come, so don't try to possess me for yourselves." Thus, in his pedagogical approach, Jesus teaches in the synagogues of others towns and cares for their needs. When news about him spreads throughout Syria, they bring to him all those who are afflicted, those suffering from various diseases and intense pain, the demon possessed, anyone. Jesus compassionately heals them, even if it didn't result in the primacy of relationship together. Soon large crowds with mixed motives follow him from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and beyond the Jordan. Nevertheless, Jesus neither loses nor veers from his primary focus. His whole person remains whole in his identity and function while in the midst of these fragmenting dynamics. Therefore, in spite of all the surrounding influences he is subjected to, his trajectory stays on target.

While in one of the towns, a man with leprosy comes up and kneels before Jesus begging him, "Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean." Moved with compassion, Jesus reaches out his hand and touches him tenderly without shame for contacting a leper, "I am willing, be made clean." Immediately the leprosy leaves him and he is made clean. As usual, Jesus tells the man not to tell anyone about his cleansing but to use it as an opportunity to get closer to God. Yet, the man couldn't restrain his excitement and begins to proclaim it widely and spread the news—resulting in Jesus being unable to enter a town openly. He often withdraws to deserted places and prays, yet large crowds pursue him from everywhere to hear him and be healed.

Though Jesus' popularity never diminishes his trajectory, it tends to obscure the human condition in surrounding sociocultural contexts. This condition operates with injustices and a lack of peace—that is, not the common peace of merely the absence of conflict, but rather the *shalom* of well-being in wholeness that only Jesus brings (Jn 14:27). This existing reality needing redemptive change, thus required Jesus' trajectory to go deeper to constitute the tactical shift of God's trajectory.

Tactical Shift of God's Trajectory

At a pivotal interaction, Jesus is teaching in his own town. So many people gather around him—including Pharisees and teachers of the law who have come from every village in Galilee and Judea, and also from Jerusalem—that there is no more room, not even in the doorway. As Jesus speaks God's word to them, some men come to him carrying a paralytic on a stretcher. Since they are not able to bring the man to Jesus because of the crowd, they go up on the roof and lower him on the stretcher through the roof tiles into the middle of the crowd before Jesus. The trust they put in Jesus really touches him, so Jesus tells the man unequivocally, "Son, your sins are forgiven."

Jesus' redemptive words raise the eyebrows of the scribes and Pharisees sitting there, stirring questions in their hearts: "Why does he speak like this? Who is this man who speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?" Jesus perceives their skepticism and somewhat angrily confronts them: "Why are you thinking these things in your heart? Which is easier to say, 'Your sins are forgiven', or to say, 'Get up, take your mat, and walk'?" Jesus isn't making qualitative claims and subjective statements that have no objective basis. So, he uses this interaction as a pivotal opportunity to reveal how his trajectory is going deeper to impact the surrounding contexts. Obviously, the former statement could be made by anyone without having a valid basis of verification, but the latter could only be stated if verified before your eyes. Jesus integrates the two choices to demonstrate how his (and God's) trajectory is going deeper into the human context to affect human minds and hearts.

"But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins"—he warmly addresses the paralyzed man—"I affirm your whole person: Get up, take your stretcher, and go home made whole from inner out." Immediately he gets up before them, picks up what he had been lying on, and goes home glorifying God. As a result, those present are filled with awe saying, "We have never witnessed anything like this"—and they give glory to God for what Jesus reveals. Yet, skepticism still persists among some, which exposes their biased lens that refuses to accept the facts of Jesus that he enacts vulnerably before them. A moment earlier, Jesus identified such bias as "evil thinking in your hearts." This is the encompassing **sin of reductionism** that most don't pay attention to and thus don't account for in their practice of faith. The deeper trajectory now enacted by Jesus, however, directly addresses this scope of sin and holds all accountable—a relational process resulting in redemptive change for those who respond to Jesus' heart-level presence and relational involvement.

After this, Jesus goes out to intentionally focus his trajectory on a person who both participates in the injustice of that time as well as is subjected to it. Jesus connects with a tax collector named Levi (Matthew) sitting at the tax office, and he says to him "Follow me." So, leaving everything behind, Levi gets up and begins to follow him. On the surface, Jesus' call appears inconsistent with what would be expected for his disciples. Yet, this is a key indicator that Jesus' trajectory is deepening. Since Levi is ostracized by the Jewish community, Jesus purposely involves himself in a grand banquet hosted by Levi at his house. Many tax collectors and sinners are also eating with Jesus and his disciples. Thus, Levi represents a key addition to his chosen disciples in the tactical shift, which equalizes them without the constraints of their sociocultural distinctions.

When the Pharisees and their scribes see this "unholy" communion, they complain to his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat and drink with those who need to be ostracized?" Now when Jesus hears their complaint, he challenges their assumptions

and corrects their bias: “It is not those who are healthy who need a doctor, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to turn around. So, go and learn what this means for your faith practice: I desire mercy and not sacrifice; live in what’s primary, not secondary.”

Jesus’ inclusive declaration reveals the tactical depth of his trajectory, which he wants us to learn in order to follow him. His trajectory is constituted not only by how inclusive his embrace of individuals is, but equally important is what underlies “I desire mercy, not sacrifice.” What he desires (*thelo*) involves not only willfully wanting this but also pressing on to enact it. This means not only to engage individuals but also to address their collective contexts and infrastructure—which “sacrifice” implies about Jewish life. To address the infrastructure of collectives, however, also necessitates addressing the full spectrum of the human condition for its redemptive change—nothing less and no substitutes, as Jesus’ trajectory enacts. As our *thelo* enacts this together with him, we will understand his heart further, and thereby learn that his love goes beyond his warmth and tenderness to include feelings not commonly associated with love—enacting tough love so to speak.

Along with sacrifices, fasting is another key part of the Jewish collective’s infrastructure. So, people come and ask Jesus a legitimate question: “Why do John’s disciples and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples eat and drink instead of fasting?” With excitement for this opportunity, the conviction of his answer puts this issue into the relational context of God’s big picture, which then brings to the light the relational process at the heart of it. That is to say, “as long as the groom is with the wedding guests, they don’t fast sadly but celebrate together.” What Jesus alludes to here is the redemptive change of the Jewish infrastructure, which signifies the *old* dying in order for the *new* to rise. Jesus makes unmistakable, however, that “the new wine” is incompatible with the old, and that it will not emerge unless the old is discarded. Regardless of the experiential truth and relational reality of the new wine constituted by Jesus, there are still those laboring under the illusion that “the old is better”—whereby assumptions are made to misdirect or block Jesus’ trajectory from completing his tactical shift. Such efforts always affect him—especially as they emerge even among his own disciples—but his feelings simply intensify with greater resolve.

Later, Jesus goes up to Jerusalem because a Jewish festival takes place. Jesus doesn’t reject the Jewish collective and participates in it, but not according to its infrastructure. By the Sheep Gate in Jerusalem there is a pool called Bethesda, where a large number of the disabled (blind, lame and paralyzed) lay hoping to be healed by the special water in the pool. One man who has been disabled for 38 years is there. When Jesus sees him lying there and realizes he has already been there a long time, Jesus feels for him saying, “Do you want to get well?” In that context and time, Jesus isn’t inquiring

but opening a unique opportunity to respond to the man. The disabled man answers, “Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool before someone else goes down ahead of me.” With a warm and tender heart, Jesus tells him, “Get up, pick up your mat and walk.” Instantly, the man gets well, picks up his mat and starts to walk. Such healing by Jesus has been witnessed before, but the time of this healing sets the stage for his deeper purpose.

Now, that day happens to be the Sabbath, and so the Jews negatively tell the man who was healed, “This is the Sabbath. The law prohibits you from picking up your mat.” When the Jews discover that Jesus enacted his healing, they begin persecuting Jesus because he is doing these things on the Sabbath. This opens up a further opportunity to put the Jewish context and infrastructure even deeper into the whole context of God’s trajectory that Jesus embodies and enacts.

So, Jesus makes his heart even more vulnerable and responds to them saying, “The whole truth is, the Son is not able to do anything on his own, but only what he sees the Father doing. For however the Father functions, the Son likewise also functions. For the Father loves the Son and shows him everything, even greater works than these so that you will be amazed. And just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so the Son also gives life to whom he wants. The Father, in fact, judges no one but has given all judgment to the Son, so that all people may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. Anyone, I say emphatically, who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him. ...I can do nothing on my own apart from the Father. I judge only as I hear, and my judgment is just, because I do not seek my own will but the will of him who sent me. ...You sent messages to John, and he testified to the truth. I don’t receive human testimony, but I say these things so that you may be saved and made whole. John was a burning and shining lamp, and you were willing to rejoice for a while in his light.

“But I have a greater testimony than John’s because of the works that the Father has given me to fulfill. These very works testify about me that the Father has sent me. The Father who sent me has himself testified about me. You have not heard his voice at any time, and you haven’t seen his form. Sadly, you don’t have his word planted in your hearts, because you don’t trust the one he sent. This is the sad reality even though you diligently study the Scriptures and presume you have eternal life by them. And yet they testify about me, but you are not willing to come to me so that you may have life (*zoe*, qualitative life together).

“I know you—that you have no love for God within you. I have come in my Father’s name, and yet you don’t accept me. If someone else comes in their own name, you will accept him. How can you believe, since you accept glory from one another but don’t seek the glory that comes from the only God? In truth, I will not accuse you to the Father. Your accuser is Moses. For if you believed Moses, you would believe me, because he wrote about me. But if you don’t believe what he wrote, how will you believe my words?”

As Jesus vulnerably pours out his heart, he both reveals the heart of the triune God and exposes their hearts in the outer-in simulations of their faith and their epistemic illusions. His trajectory will continue to unfold in this integral process that is both immeasurable and inescapable.

On a Sabbath he is going through the grain fields. His disciples are hungry and begin to pick and eat some heads of grain. When the Pharisees see this, they say to him, “Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?” Even though Jesus is annoyed by their continued pushback and invalid criticism, here is another opportunity to clarify their theology and correct their practice needed for their redemptive change. So, he carefully reviews the Scripture with them to remind them of Jewish history: that David and his cohorts were hungry and then entered the house of God and ate the consecrated bread, which was not lawful for them but only for the priests; that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple violate the Sabbath and yet are innocent according to the Law. “Pay attention and take notice, one greater than the temple is here to bring redemptive change to that context and infrastructure. If you embraced my *thelo* to enact the primary over the secondary, you would not condemn persons who live accordingly. This is the experiential truth and relational reality from God being enacted before you: The Sabbath was made for humans and not humans for the Sabbath. Therefore, the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.”

This is the new that rises when the old undergoes redemptive change. And Jesus’ trajectory unfolds for its completion, notably among the collective of God’s people and their infrastructure. In particular, the theology and practice of the Jewish collective had become an end in itself by composing a Rule of Law for its infrastructure such that it merely used observing the Sabbath, fasting and cleansing as identity markers to define them in the human context. This can be a subtle process that Jesus always brings to the forefront for God’s people to discover the identity they assume for their faith.

A similar scenario happens on another Sabbath, in which Jesus is teaching in the synagogue again. A man is there whose right hand is shriveled. Expectantly, the scribes and Pharisees are watching Jesus acutely to see if they can further charge him with breaking the law on the Sabbath. Their behavior arouses Jesus’ anger and also grieves him because of the hardness of their hearts. So, he tells the man with the shriveled hand to get up and stand here in the middle. Then, Jesus pointedly faces them with the question: “Is it lawful to do good on the Sabbath or to do evil, to save life or to destroy it?”

Jesus doesn’t expect them to answer his question, not because it is rhetorical but because doing so will prevent them from charging him with being unlawful. Warmly, Jesus tells the man to stretch his hand, and his hand is restored. Immediately, the Pharisees are filled with rage and start plotting with the Herodians against him, how to exterminate him.

Jesus is well aware of this and simply withdraws with his disciples to the sea. And in spite of the turmoil his presence generates in others, large crowds from all the surrounding regions follow him for the good he is doing. Accordingly, whenever the unclean spirits see him, they fall down before him and cry out, “You are the Son of God!” And he strongly warns them not to make him known, so that what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah is fulfilled: “Here is my beloved in whom I delight...he will proclaim justice to the nations...until he brings justice to victory” (Isa 42:1-4).

And as he brings justice to victory, his true disciples must be involved with him in this fight for justice. This is clearly established in his most significant teaching, coming next.

During those days Jesus goes to the mountains to pray and spend all night communicating with the Father. The primacy of this time and their relationship together are irreplaceable for Jesus to share the feelings of his heart and to attend to all the ways he’s been affected. When daylight comes, he gathers together his twelve disciples and begins to teach them the essential foundation for the theology and practice of his true disciples.

His teaching is the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5-7), which essentially integrates his **manifesto for discipleship**. It begins with the beatitudes, each one of which should not be taken as separate from the others, because they compose together the essential steps in their identity formation. By the nature of who, what and how Jesus’ disciples are, the first step involves the honest acknowledgement of being “poor in spirit”; then that must involve being vulnerable with that reality about oneself, whereby it would lead unavoidably to “mourn,” thus naturally including the third step of becoming “humble.” As this identity forms, there is the turnaround for one’s person about the need for “righteousness.” Contrary to the common Jewish collective definition of righteousness and its practice, righteousness is a legal term that involves the whole person whom others can count on in relationships to be that person—the integrity of which can only be verified from inner out. Therefore, pivotal in the identity formation of Jesus’ disciples is for the whole of who, what and how one is to truly function in relationships as that person Jesus counts on. So, this identity only becomes an existential reality for the person “who hungers and thirsts for righteousness.” This is the only righteousness of significance in God’s family, thus Jesus makes unequivocal that “unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never belong to my family” (5:20). As this identity forms its basic foundation, it further develops in the remaining steps. Each step includes a relational outcome that leads to their wholeness integrally as persons and with relationship together in God’s family.

When the identity and function of his disciples forms in wholeness, “you are the light of the world when you don’t diminish this identity; and you are the salt of the earth when you don’t reduce your function.” Jesus is emphatic about their identity and function living in wholeness in the primacy of their relationship together. And his manifesto continues to outline this relational context and process based only on his relational terms.

Jesus clarifies his relational terms and corrects other terms used as a substitute, which creates a bias in the function of faith practice in daily life. His terms are for covenant relationship together, which converges in God’s law. These imperative terms are both qualitative and relational, thus no amount of the quantitative can fulfill them—the shape and illusion commonly used to obey them. Therefore, Jesus proceeds to clarify the integrity of his terms and to correct assumptions about being obedient.

First of all, God’s terms for covenant relationship are not subject to revisions, even though in existential practice they are subjected to diverse interpretations. Thus, with absolute resolve Jesus states that he has no intention of minimizing or even doing away with God’s lawful terms “but to fulfill them (i.e., *pleroo*, to complete) for the wholeness of covenant relationship together.” Then to distinguish these qualitative-relational terms, Jesus proceeds to compare their primary function with contradictory practice that only has some secondary appearance of obeying the law. The relational outcome of the former gets to the heart of persons and that depth level of involvement in relationships together. The latter results in relational consequences that fragment, separate or disable relationships from the design and purpose that the Father constitutes for the children in his family. When his qualitative-relational terms are embodied in their identity and enacted in their function, they will “be perfect (*teleios*, i.e., complete, fully developed in wholeness) in the very likeness of your heavenly Father” (5:48).

Underlying the above practice of the law is the functional dynamic that defines the identity of the person, which Jesus now addresses in everyday life. Persons either function from outer in, with a self-consciousness focused on secondary (or less significant) matters. This is the dynamic that prevails in the practice of faith—a practice that subtly revolves around the appearance of self to others, even when an act appears to be for others. Or persons function from the inner out, with a consciousness of the heart of their person focused on primary matters. This is the dynamic, the qualitative-relational dynamic, which connects with the Father as well as with others in the heart-level involvement of relationship together—appearances notwithstanding. Therefore, with his contempt for the former dynamic, Jesus takes his disciples to the heart of his teaching—expressing his empathy for their struggles living in the latter dynamic, “Don’t worry...” (6:25-34). When they understand what’s primary to God, then their person can function in this primacy to experience the wholeness that God gives in response to them. But they

must also understand that the inner-out dynamic is nonnegotiable with anything less or any substitutes—“For what is important to you, there your heart will be also” (6:21)—and that God’s relational process and outcome are irreducible. Thus, in his empathy Jesus is uncompromising, with nothing less and no substitutes, “No one can serve two masters” (6:24).

Then, in the last part of his manifesto (Mt 7), Jesus clarifies the specific context that distinguishes God’s terms for their identity and function. That context (“what is holy,” 7:6) in which this relational process is enacted is set apart from the *common* surrounding contexts, because this is the relational context of the *uncommon* God. Therefore, to navigate God’s relational context involves a different process than what is commonly engaged, which then brings out the contrast and conflict between them. His disciples need to fully understand this essential distinction, and that the two are incompatible and cannot be combined or interchanged. Moreover, they will “be judged by the same standards with which you judge others, and you will be measured by the same measure you use” (7:2). This uncommon relational context requires a relational process uncommon from the prevailing way relationships are conducted. That challenges and confronts, in particular, how faith is practiced with a diverse approach that in effect cultivates simulations in their identity and enables illusions of their function (7:13). Jesus withholds no consequence from such a relational process: “In spite of all your claims to your acts of faith in my name, I never knew you in the relational context and process of my terms for relationship together” (7:22-23).

His rejection of a diverse approach to discipleship is encompassing. Even though its growth and development may appear to be similar to his terms, such similarities would merely reflect a surface observation commonly made instead of going deeper. Because of this common condition widely engaged, Jesus further shares the feelings in his heart to make his manifesto imperative for his disciples with this nonnegotiable conclusion:

“Therefore, every person, who listens to my words composed in relational language and lives by them in their heart from inner out, will be analogous to a wise person who built their house on a rock-solid foundation. And no matter how severe the surrounding conditions, it didn’t collapse because of its irreducible foundation. But, in contrast, everyone, who hear these words of mine and doesn’t respond to them from their heart, will be analogous to a foolish person who built their house on the sand. When severe conditions pounded that house, it collapsed in an unforgettable experience.”

In other words, his manifesto cannot be taken lightly, set aside until later, or simply filed away in a mental folder of Jesus’ teachings. His disciples are accountable for the terms of all his words—always with nothing less and no substitutes.

When Jesus finishes sharing the words from his heart, the others besides the disciples who heard him are amazed with the heart-level integrity of his teachings. Up to now, they have not witnessed such depth in theological education. Yet, what kind and level of change Jesus' qualitative words bring forth in their lives remains an open question.

Theological education has had a history of merely documenting the words from Scripture and transmitting that information in the classroom. This includes the Sermon on the Mount, which, if listened to in Jesus' relational language, would have resulted in a different foundation that would not be as shaky or even be collapsing as witnessed currently in a multitude of theological colleges and seminaries. This just corroborates how imperatively Jesus' manifesto must be enacted in order to be his disciples; and teachers, scholars and leaders need to verify the integrity of their identity and function. And turning to an online trajectory will not bring the relational outcome of knowing the Word, as many are placing their hope on—not to mention, the Word also knowing those so engaged.

After Jesus comes down from the mountain, large crowds follow him as he enters Capernaum. A centurion, who loves the Jewish nation and built them a synagogue, comes to Jesus, pleading with him, "Lord, my valued servant is lying home paralyzed in terrible agony and about to die." Jesus responds kindly, "I will come and heal him." But the centurion replies, "Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof, but just say the word, and my servant will be healed. For I too am a man with authority, with soldiers under me who obey my commands, and a servant who does what he's told to do." When Jesus hears the centurion's heart poured out to him, he is deeply touched and declares to those following him, "I tell you the truth, I have not found anyone in Israel with such a great faith. I share with you the reality that many will come from all over to participate in the banquet with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. But these subjects of the kingdom will be thrown out, because they don't truly belong in God's family." Then he says heart to heart in loving response to the centurion, "Go forth! Just as you trusted me to act, it will be fulfilled." And his servant is healed at that very moment. "Just say the word, Jesus," indeed is the reciprocal relational involvement that Jesus desires, expects and holds accountable from his disciples.

Afterward, Jesus is on his way to a town called Nain, with his disciples and a large crowd traveling with him. Just as he approaches the town gate, a dead man is being carried out by a large procession from the town. He was his mother's only son, and she is a widow. When the Lord sees her, his heart suffers by her deep pain; his empathy isn't just a mental process but always vulnerably involves his heart. So, he responds in tender love and says, "Don't weep." Then he touches the open coffin, and the pallbearers stop. Compassionately, he says, "Young man, I say to you, arise." The dead son sits up and

begins to speak. Then, in his family love Jesus reconnects the son with his mother. She simply receives him back joyfully, without wondering what just happened. But the others are in awe and glorify God, saying “A great prophet has risen among us,” and “God has visited his people.” This report about Jesus spreads throughout Judea and all the surrounding country.

The reports about Jesus are not always reliable, with misinformation conflating with the facts to misrepresent the qualitative-relational significance of his identity and function. Perhaps because of this, John the Baptist wants verification directly from the source, so he sends two of his disciples to ask Jesus, “Are you indeed the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?” Jesus answers them with the experiential truth and relational reality of the facts that he is enacting, which when seen and heard without a predisposed bias will verify the identity and function of his whole person.

After John’s messengers leave with the indisputable truth of Jesus, Jesus begins to speak to the crowds about John’s uncommon lifestyle and ministry. His significance cannot be diminished, because he prepared the way for Jesus’ mission to unfold. Moreover, Jesus declares, on the one hand, “Truly I tell you, among those born of women no one is greater than John.” On the other hand, “but the least in the kingdom of God is greater than he.” In other words, Jesus negates the value given to human distinctions and equalizes all persons in God’s family. His declaration forecasts the redemptive change that he will complete in the tactical shift of God’s trajectory in the surrounding collective context and infrastructure to equalize God’s family embodied in the church.

Given the existing condition of the collective context, Jesus then openly shares the mixed feelings in his heart. “To what should I compare the people of this generation, and what are they like. They are like children sitting in the marketplace and calling to each other in different ways; but each way doesn’t evoke the appropriate response. In a similar way, John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, ‘He has a demon!’ The Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say, ‘Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’ Yet, the wisdom of your ways will be justified only by the truth—the Truth embodied before you, which many consider to be an inconvenient truth.”

Then Jesus’ trajectory intensifies overtly on the offensive. He boldly begins to denounce the towns where most of his miracles were done. Why? Because they do not repent or enact the turnaround necessary to change. “Woe to you Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles that were enacted in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented because of who and what was revealed to them. But I tell you directly, it will be more favorable for Tyre and Sidon on the day of judgment than for you. And you, Capernaum, will you be lifted up to heaven? No, you will go down to Hades. For if the miracles enacted in you were done in Sodom, it would still dwell until today. But I tell you directly, it will be more favorable for Sodom on the day of judgment than for you.”

(In this biblical history, it seems as if the generations have evolved into a Scripture Alzheimer's—constrained in a here-and-now culture forgetful of God's ongoing presence and involvement.)

At that time Jesus also firmly reassures others: “Come to me, all of you who are weary from the human condition and burdened by the surrounding context, and I will give you rest from inner out. Take up my terms and learn from me, because I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your whole person from inner out. For my terms are unpretentious and my burden is not overbearing.”

Another pivotal interaction reveals Jesus' trajectory penetrating the inequity of the prevailing culture and infrastructure. One of the Pharisees invites him to eat at his house. And a woman in the town, who was a labeled sinner, finds out that Jesus is reclining at the table in the Pharisee's house. Even though that setting is off-limits to her, she brings an alabaster jar of perfume (a means of her vocation) and goes behind him at his feet. As her heart pours out weeping, she begins to wash his feet with her tears, then wipes his feet with her hair, kissing them and anointing them with the perfume. Jesus fully receives her without embarrassment or shame.

When the Pharisee who invited him sees this, he says mumbling to himself, “This woman, if he is a prophet, he would know who and what kind of woman this is who is touching him—she's a sinner!”

Well aware of the culture clash that is happening, Jesus replies to him without hesitation, “Simon, I have something to say to you for your honest assessment.” Simon agrees, “OK, teacher.”

“A creditor had two debtors. One owed the equivalent of 500 days of wages, and the other only 50. Since they could not pay it back, he graciously forgave them both. So, which of them will love him more?”

Simon answers intellectually, “I suppose the one he forgave more.” Jesus stares at him and says, “You have judged correctly.” Then, turning to the woman, he emphasizes to Simon this exposing contradiction: “Can you see this woman without your biased lens? Contrary to your culture and vigorous practice, I entered your house and you gave me no water for my feet, but she, with her tears, has washed my feet and wiped them with her hair. Furthermore, you gave me no customary kiss, but she hasn't stopped kissing my feet since I came in. Moreover, contrary to cultural stipulation, you didn't anoint my head with olive oil, but she has anointed my feet with perfume. Therefore, I tell you unequivocally, her many sins have been forgiven, which is unmistakably verified by how much she loves me. But the one who is forgiven little, loves little—no matter how rigorous your faith.”

Then, Jesus warmly, tenderly and deeply says to her, “Your sins are forgiven. Your trusting faith has saved you. Go forth from here in the peace only I give—my *peace as wholeness* of your whole person from inner out.”

And those who are at the table with him begin to say with puzzlement among themselves, “Who is this man who even forgives sins?” But they don’t address the issue of how much they have been forgiven and thereby love.

All Christians also need to assess personally the essential equation Jesus raises that is basic to our faith: God’s forgiveness, not simply as a core belief but as the experiential truth and relational reality that determines in everyday life our level of interaction with others and how we are involved with them. ‘Love less or more’ is directly correlated to the ongoing experience and reality of God’s love for us. Therefore, whom we do or don’t interact with, and how we are involved with them or not, all bear witness to his love in us or eluding us. And in these divisive times prevailing today, what does the world witness among Christians? Is that witness in fact reinforcing or even sustaining a divisive climate—even passively in complicity?

As Jesus more deeply enacts the tactical shift of God’s trajectory, he further counters the discriminatory culture and inequitable infrastructure. One significant outcome from his relational process is the turnaround occurring at the gender level. As he travels from one town and village to another, he declares the good news of the kingdom of God—which also includes addressing the bad news in the surrounding context. God’s kingdom isn’t a concept or a mere future hope, but Jesus embodies it with his inner circle of disciples that includes some women: women such as Mary Magdalene (seven demons were cast out of her), Joanna the wife of Chuza (Herod’s servant), Susanna, and many others who are supporting this new existential body with their own possessions. The role of women has often been either ignored or downplayed, but not by Jesus who affirmed them at the heart of his witnesses. This involves the redemptive change critical to his tactical shift, which continues to be the change lacking in many Christian contexts.

With all the attention forming around Jesus and the agitation also created by his actions, his biological family seek to restrain him because people are saying “He’s out of his mind.” During this time, a demon possessed man who is blind and unable to speak is brought to Jesus. He heals him, so that the man could both speak and see—once again astounding the crowds to say “Could this be the Son of David?” But, when the scribes and Pharisees hear this, they assert, “This man drives out demons only by Beelzebul, the ruler of the demons.”

In rebuttal, Jesus declares: “Every kingdom divided against itself is headed for destruction, and no city or house divided against itself will stand. If Satan drives out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand? And if I drive out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your sons drive them out? For this very reason they will be your judges. Therefore, if I drive out demons by the Spirit of God, then, and only then, the kingdom of God has come upon you. And thus, ‘Anyone who is not with

me is against me, and anyone who does not gather with me scatters.’ Consequently, I assert unequivocally, people will be forgiven every sin and blasphemy, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven, either in the present or the future.”

“Accordingly, every tree is defined by its fruit. So, you divisive brood! How can you speak good things, much less act in love, when your heart is unclean. For the mouth speaks from the overflow of the heart. Understand this existential reality that on the day of judgment people will have to account for every worthless word they speak”—end of debate.

Then the scribes and Pharisees shift their tactics and want a sign from the Teacher. Jesus isn’t fooled and further exposes them for where their hearts are. So, he refuses to give them a sign, since they already have indicators from Scripture that all point to him. After setting the record straight and putting them in their place, he further reinforces the experiential truth and relational reality of who constitutes his family: “My brothers, sisters and mother are those who listen carefully and enact the word of God from their hearts—relationally involved in reciprocal relationship together with me, where I am.”

While intensifying the tactical shift of God’s trajectory, Jesus enacts an unexpected shift in his teaching of God’s words. Since his words constitute the functional essence of life, they must be understood in his relational language in order to gain this significance. The common practice is to take the words from God as composed in referential language to transmit information about God. With this lens, God’s words are diminished, lacking the depth of God’s heart, and thereby are seen more shallowly to reinforce or sustain a perception of God’s function as from outer in, which humans then bear in likeness. To counter this approach to his teaching, Jesus shifts to the use of parables in order to communicate with those truly listening to God’s words in relational language, and who respond to them accordingly.

As a very large crowd gathers around him by the sea, Jesus begins to teach them many things in parables. “Listen! Consider the sower who went out to sow. As he sowed, some seed fell along the path; it was trampled on and the birds of the sky devoured it. Other seed fell on rocky ground, where it didn’t have much soil, and it grew up quickly since the soil wasn’t deep. But when the sun came up, it was scorched, and since it had not taken root, it withered away. Other seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up with it and choked it, so it didn’t produce fruit. Still other seed fell on good ground and it grew up—producing fruit that increased thirty, sixty and a hundred times.” Then, he calls out emphatically, “Let anyone who has ears to hear listen.”

In their puzzled thoughts the disciples ask him about this shift in his teaching and the meaning of the parables. So, he clarifies this reality:

“The language mysteries about the kingdom of God involve a relational process, which require a relational response to know; and that’s why they have been given for you to know. But to those not relationally involved it has not been given. That’s

why I speak to them in parables, because looking they do not see, and hearing they do not listen or understand. Isaiah's prophecy is fulfilled in them, 'You will be ever hearing but not really understand; you will be ever seeing but not really perceiving. For these people's minds are preoccupied and their hearts are distant' (Isa 6:9-10)."

So, he says to his disciples: "Don't you understand this parable? How then will you understand any parable in my teaching? The sower's seed is the word of God. Some are like the word sown on the path. They hear it favorably, then Satan works to negate the word they heard. And others are like seed sown on rocky ground. When they hear the word, immediately they receive it with joy. But the word is not received deep enough to take root in their hearts, so they believe for a while and fall away in a time of testing. Still others, on the one hand, are the ones who readily hear the word, but, on the other hand, because of the thorns in their surrounding contexts that determine the worries of this age, the illusion of wealth, and the desires for other things, they are constrained and thus become unfruitful in their faith. That leaves only the word sown on good ground, distinguishing those who listen and understand the word with an honest and good heart, whereby they are vulnerably involved in relationship together with the Word for a fruitful life."

Then his words focus directly on his disciples in the relational process that integrally defines their identity and determines their function. "No one, after lighting a lamp (i.e., distinguishing their identity) covers it with a basket or puts it under a bed, but puts it on a lampstand so that those who come in may see its light (i.e., distinguishing their function). For no identity is concealed that won't be revealed, nor function hidden that won't be exposed and brought to light. Therefore, if you have ears to hear my words, then listen carefully. Pay close attention to every word I communicate in relational language. By the **measure** you use, that **measure** will define and determine the results in your everyday life."

His last statement (Mk 4:24) declares **the definitive paradigm** essential for his disciples that will define the identity and determine the function of them and their God. Thus, his paradigm underlies the theology and practice of all Christians. And measures of anything less and any substitutes for the measures composed by the Word are consequential for the existential results in our faith daily.

After that, he presents another parable to them in order to understand their context together: "The kingdom of God is analogous to a man who sowed good seed in his field. But while people were sleeping, his enemy came, sowed weeds among the wheat and left—that is, *darnel*, a weed similar in appearance to wheat in the early stages. When the plants sprouted and produced grain, then the weeds also appeared. The farmer's servants reported to him, 'Master, didn't you sow good seed in the field? Then where did the

weeds come from?’ He told them without hesitation, ‘An enemy did this.’ The angry servants replied, ‘So, do you want us to go and pull out the weeds?’ He stated firmly, ‘Thank you, but no. When you pull up the weeds, you might also uproot the wheat with them. Let them both grow together until the harvest. At that time I’ll tell the reapers, ‘Gather the weeds first and tie them in bundles to burn them, and then collect the wheat for my barn’.’”

Then Jesus switches from this contextual issue to the process for growing his family: “The kingdom of God is like a mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his field. The fact is that the mustard seed is the smallest of all the seeds in the ground, but when grown it’s taller than the garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the sky come and nest in its branches.” This process is a relational process and its outcome is a relational outcome.

Jesus adds another parable to reinforce this process: “The kingdom of God is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into 50lbs of flour until all of it was leavened.” Parables become his main mode of teaching, so that what was spoken through the prophet is fulfilled, “I will open my mouth in parables; I will declare things hidden from human thinking since the creation of the world.”

His disciples finally have the courage to ask him, “Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field.” He responds telling them to take in the context of God’s big (read whole) picture: “The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man; the field is the surrounding context of the world; and the good seed’s growth, those are the children of God’s family. The weeds are the children of Satan, who sowed them.” Both sets of children live co-existing in conflict, with the influence of the latter always engaged in counter-relational work. “The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels. The Son of Man will send out his cohorts, and they will complete the relational consequences for the latter group and fulfill the relational outcome for the former group—the righteous who will shine like the sun in their Father’s family.

“Therefore, let anyone who currently has open ears listen carefully to my words in relational language and thereby respond in likeness. And be assured that the measure you use for your identity and function, and for your theology and practice, will be the measure you receive for your results—nothing more and likely something less.”

After he shares with them the parables of hidden treasure, the pearl of great value, and the net, he further asks them, “Have you understood all these things?” they answer him sheepishly, “Yes.” He adds expectantly, “Every teacher of the law who has become a disciple in the kingdom of God is like the owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom treasures new and old.”

When Jesus finishes these parables, he goes out to further heal persons, cast out demons, and even raises a girl from death. One day he and his disciples get into a boat, and he directs them, “Let’s cross over to the other side of the lake.” So they leave the crowd and set out, and as they are sailing Jesus falls asleep. A fierce windstorm comes

down on the lake, so that they are in danger because the high waves are swamping the boat. But Jesus keeps sleeping through it all. So, they wake him up shouting in fear, “Master, Master, we’re going to die, don’t you care?”

Then he gets up, rebukes the wind and raging waves, and says to the sea, “Silence! Be still!”—and the wind ceases and there is a great calm. After that, he expresses his disappointment in them: “Why are you afraid? Where is your faith? Do you still have little or no trust in me?” And as they typically focused on the secondary at the expense of the primary, they are fearful and amazed, asking one another, “Who then is this? Even the winds and the waves obey him!”

It is critical for all followers of Jesus to make a clear distinction between, on the one hand, their faith as merely a belief that focuses on Jesus as the *object* of our belief—a faith which mainly assents to who Jesus is. On the other hand, faith is the relational trust in Jesus as the *subject* person who can be counted on and thus trusted in relationship together. The latter is the only faith that has significance to Jesus, and that he requires from all his followers—the relational function of which is at the heart of his true witnesses and disciples. Making assumptions about faith is a common practice, but any measure of faith used is always subject to Jesus’ definitive paradigm.

Later, he goes to his hometown and his disciples follow him. When the Sabbath comes, he begins to teach in the synagogue. Many who hear him are astonished and say: “Where did this man get these things? What is this wisdom that has been given to him, and how are these miracles performed by his hands? Isn’t this the carpenter, the son of Mary, and the brother of James, Joses, Judas and Simon? And aren’t his sisters here with us?” Thus, based on having such a common background, they are offended by his presumed arrogance that puts himself above them.

Not surprisingly, Jesus sadly says to them, “A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown, among his relatives, and in his household.” Given this surrounding attitude, their unbelief puts limits on what Jesus enacts in that context. and though not unexpected, he is still amazed at their lack of trust and is disappointed in their missing out. His experience is a teaching loop for his followers that their biases predispose them to diverse measure of faith—the levels of which affect Jesus deeply in his heart, because he is vulnerably present and relationally involved by his whole person, nothing less and no substitutes.

As his trajectory extends to all the towns and villages, his heart is moved with compassion for the crowds, because they are distressed and dejected, like sheep without a shepherd. So, he says with urgency to his disciples: “The harvest is abundant, but faithful workers are few; therefore, pray to the Lord of the harvest to send out such workers into his harvest. The time for this essential action is now.”

This leads to Jesus gathering his twelve disciples in order to send them out in a trajectory with the power and authority over all demons and to heal diseases, along with proclaiming the kingdom of God. He also gives them specific instructions for their trajectory to be traveled lightly with the bare necessities and to make the proper adjustments to each context without being distracted by secondary matters or diminishing what's primary. In other words, he wants their trajectory to be in likeness of his. That also means that they are not engaging just individuals out there, but also integrally addressing the collective context and infrastructure as well.

Jesus wants them to be fully aware of what they are intruding on. "Look, I'm sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore, be wise but don't resort to trickery or shady tactics. Always beware of your adversaries, because they will hand you over to local courts and flog you in their synagogues. You will even be brought before governors and kings because of me, to bear witness to them and to the Gentiles. But when they hand you over, don't worry about how or what you are to speak. For you will be given what to say at the that time, because it won't be about you but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you. Take me at my word and trust me."

Furthermore, he wants them to understand the inequity of the surrounding context. "Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child. Children will rise up against parents and have them put to death. You, too, will be hated because of my name. But the person who endures through all this divisiveness will be made whole. This is what you can expect since you belong to me. A disciple is not above his teacher, or a slave above his master. It is well for a disciple to become like his teacher—though not in a rabbinic mode. So, just as I experienced, if they called the head of our house Beelzebul, how much more discrimination will target the members of my household! But don't be afraid of them, because your loving Father is in control.

"Therefore, everyone who openly from their heart confesses about me to others, be assured that I will also affirm you from my heart before my Father in heaven. But whoever directly or indirectly denies me before others, even in their silence, I will also deny before my Father. That's why you should never assume that I came to bring common peace on the earth. The unequivocal truth is that I bring a sword. [The symbol of a sword is not associated with Jesus, but that's because his tactical shift of God's trajectory is either not understood or selectively ignored, depending on one's bias.] For I came to turn a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a person's enemies will be the members of their own household [as Micah 7:6 predicted]. And the one who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and the one who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. That is to say, whoever doesn't take up these hard realities to follow me is not worthy of me. These priorities will result in either loss or fulfillment for oneself."

During this time King Herod hears about everything that is going on, because Jesus' name has become well-known. Herod is perplexed about him, because some have said that John the Baptist has been raised from the dead—whom he had beheaded. Others say that Elijah appears, or that one of the ancient prophets has risen. Herod feels threatened, so he wants to see Jesus.

When the apostles return from their first mission journey without him, they report to Jesus all that they have done. He responds to them in loving care for their needs: “Come with me to a remote place away from the crowds and rest for a while.” He takes them and withdraws privately to a town called Bethsaida. When the crowds find out, they follow after him. This opens further opportunities for Jesus to develop his disciples for their trajectory ahead. Later that day, his disciples approach him and say, “This place is deserted, and it’s already late. Send the crowd away so that they can go into the surrounding villages and countryside to buy themselves something to eat.” Jesus responds with a surprising challenge, “You give them something to eat.” This set in motion a mental process that would lead to their deeper development of their trust in Jesus, which will be at the heart of following him and being where he is in their discipleship. The outcome from this experience of feeding the 5,000 will also be amplified later by his feeding the 4,000.

When those among the 5,000 realize the sign Jesus has enacted, they say, “This truly is the Prophet who is to come into the world.” As Jesus becomes aware of their intentions to come and take him by force to make him king, he immediately makes his disciples get into the boat and go ahead of him to the other side. Without fear or anxiety, he then simply withdraws from the crowd and goes to the mountain by himself to pray—his primary relational connection with the Father. Meanwhile, well into the night, the boat is in the middle of the sea battered by waves, as they strain at the oars because the wind is against them. Very early in the morning Jesus comes toward them walking on the sea. When the disciples see him actually walking on the water, they are terrified. “It’s a ghost!” they cry out in fear. But Jesus asserts strongly in response, “Have courage! It is I. Don’ be afraid.”

Impulsively, Peter shouts back, “Lord, if it’s you, command me to come to you on the water.” Jesus welcomes the opportunity in spite of Peter’s capriciousness and says “Come.” As expected, Peter readily steps out, but soon is distracted anxiously by the wind. When he sinks, he cries out a different tune to the Lord that deeply disappoints Jesus, “You of little faith, why do you doubt and not trust me because of circumstances? You have to learn what’s primary and submit your person to me in this relational process, or else your faith will have no significance to me and to others you intend to serve.”

When they get into the boat, the wind ceases. Even though the other disciples revere him as the Son of God, they are still completely astounded by this experience, because they have not understood about the loaves earlier. Sadly, instead, their hearts are hardened by keeping relational distance.

As they cross over and come to shore at Gennesaret, people immediately recognize him since his fame has preceded him. People hurry throughout that region and begin to carry the sick on mats to wherever they hear he is. No matter what village, town or country he goes to, they lay the sick in the marketplaces and beg him that they may touch just the end of his robe. Jesus doesn't oppose such healing, so whoever touches it is healed. But he also feels sadness, because the outer things about him have become an end in themselves rather than a means for connection with his whole person. In this, even though their situations and circumstances are now better, they basically are still missing out on what's most important. He will clarify and correct this for them in a pivotal interaction to unfold next. Moreover, even his disciples need to learn to be involved in this relational dynamic at the heart of his trajectory (1) in order to "follow my person...and be where I am," (2) so that their trajectory will be in the qualitative image and relational likeness of his.

As Jesus' trajectory penetrates deeper and deeper at the heart level, the following pivotal interaction is also significant for leading into his *functional shift* of God's trajectory.

Functional Shift of God's Trajectory

Jesus' trajectory penetrates deeper into the heart level in order to distinguish unmistakably the function primary to God, and thus the integral function of who and what he embodies and how he enacts his whole person. The significance of his primary function is critical for his followers to understand, so that they will be involved with him at this level of function—the measure of which is not subject to variable engagement. Jesus clarifies and corrects this function in the next interaction, which becomes pivotal for who will or will not follow his person.

When the crowd see that neither Jesus nor his disciples are on this side of the sea, they get into boats to go to the other side looking for him. They know that the disciples went off in a boat the day before. So, when they find Jesus on the other side, they inquire, "Rabbi, when did you get here?"—not realizing he walked on the water.

Jesus answers with unveiling words from his heart that makes vulnerable anyone following him: "The honest reality is that you pursue me, not because you perceive the signs, but because you ate the loaves and were filled. Don't work on the secondary things that will not endure but on the primary that is never ending, which the Son of Man will fulfill for you because God the Father has placed his full approval on him."

They ask without deeper consideration, “What can we do to perform the works of God?” Jesus clarifies with pointed conviction that penetrates to the underlying function facing them: “There is only one work of God, the primacy of relational work, which is for you to trust from your heart in the one he has sent face to face on his relational terms.” On the defensive by this time, they try to put the responsibility back on Jesus, so they ask, “What sign, then, are you going to do so that we may see and believe you? What are you going to perform? Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness—just as written that he gave them bread from heaven to eat.” Jesus rebuts, “The reality is that Moses didn’t give you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is the person who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.” With their lens still focused on the secondary, they appeal, “Sir, give us this bread always so we will not be without.”

Jesus asserts without hesitation, “I am the bread of life. No one who submits to me will ever be unfulfilled, and no one who trusts in me will ever be lacking again. But as I emphasize to you, you’ve seen me face to face, and yet you do not trust me. Everyone the Father gives me will submit to me, and the one who submits to me I will never push aside. For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but to enact the will of him who sent me. For this is the will of my Father: that everyone who sees the Son from inner out and trusts him will have this life in relationship together forever.”

Then, in their selective listening of Jesus’ words, the Jews start grumbling among themselves, because he said “I am the bread that came down from heaven.” They conclude from their assumptions, “Isn’t this Jesus the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, ‘I have come down from heaven’?”

Jesus penetrates deeper to distinguish the qualitative from the quantitative that he embodies: “Stop grumbling among yourselves and face this reality. No one can connect with me unless the Father who sent me leads them. It is written in the Prophets, ‘And they will all be taught by God’. So, everyone who has listened to and learns from the Father connects with me. Now learn also that no one has seen the Father except the one who is from God; only he has seen the Father. Therefore, listen and learn further from God, anyone who trusts in me receives the never-ending quality of life, because I am that qualitative bread of life. Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness and they died. Here before you is the qualitative bread that was sent from God, so that anyone may partake of it and not die. I, the person face to face before you, am the living bread that came down from God. If anyone partakes of my person, they will never stop experiencing the qualitative outcome. Take to heart that the bread I give for the qualitative life of the world is my person embodied vulnerably for you to embrace heart to heart—nothing less and no substitutes.”

The qualitative function that Jesus enacts is uncommon to the world. Yet, that function in the common's terms keeps evolving further entrenched in quantitative terms—notably today in the modern world of technology. The quantitative commonly defines human identity and determines human function in subtle and seductive ways, such that its influence pervades many Christians and churches. Just like those above following Jesus, their faith revolves around what God does, notably for them, and focuses on what they can do for God, if not for themselves. On this quantitative basis, their faith becomes disconnected from the qualitative-relational context Jesus embodied, and distant from the qualitative-relational process he enacted. If Christians listen carefully, the qualitative functional terms for relationship together as his followers will unfold from Jesus' words—the measure of which is integral for the irreducible identity (nothing less) and nonnegotiable function (no substitutes) of his true followers. Jesus' heart is encompassing and inclusive but has no room for the common; thus his person will not and cannot have relationship with us on our terms, even with good intentions. The Shepherd does not follow the sheep!

In the limits and constraints of their quantitative lens, the Jews argumentatively raise the issue, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?”

Jesus paints the qualitative picture of the relational process necessary for them to partake of the substance of his person, and thereby be intimately involved with him in reciprocal relationship together for this ongoing relational outcome—the experiential truth and relational reality of which are measured only by the substance of his person. (And simply partaking of the communion elements quantified by the bread of his flesh and the cup of his blood is never sufficient for this relational outcome.) “Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who is nourished, nurtured and sustained by me will live anew because of my whole person. So, either keep partaking of the old and die, or take in the new and live.”

Therefore, when many of his so-called disciples heard his words, they concluded, “This teaching is hard. Who can accept it?”

Consciously aware of the grumbling among those disciples, he openly states: “Does this offend your sensibilities? Then, what if you were to observe the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? The Spirit is the one who gives life; the flesh doesn't help this life process at all. The words that I have shared with you are of this Spirit and thus are life. Yet, there are some among you who won't believe. This is why I told you earlier that no one can connect with me unless the Father has enabled them.”

In these few words just stated, Jesus vulnerably reveals the Spirit and the Father, whose persons along with his point to the whole of God, whose triunity is at the heart of their function. This constitutes the primacy of their relational function that defines God's identity and determines God's function, which then also constitutes God's family in likeness. Who and what Jesus vulnerably reveals of God and how God *is* does not represent a possible reality or even a probable one, but the existential reality of the whole of God's vulnerable presence and relational involvement. Jesus' trajectory is not distinguished with anything less or any substitutes. Therefore, the measure we use for God is the only God we get; and the God we get to use for our faith is the

Without room for negotiation according to their terms, many of those disciples turn back and no longer follow him. This is the ongoing tension, conflict and consequence between his 'nothing less and no substitutes' and their 'anything less and any substitutes'. Given how pervasive the latter is, Jesus feels compelled to also ask the Twelve, "You don't want to leave too, do you?"

Simon Peter speaks out first, "Lord, to whom will we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God." Yet, how deeply Peter has ingested Jesus words and digested his bread of life is an open question at this stage. Peter's function still hasn't shifted to the qualitative for his trajectory to be in likeness of Jesus'. So, the Twelve continue to follow Jesus even as they struggle with the relational terms and process that Jesus makes the function for his disciples in reciprocal relationship together. Their struggle will keep emerging as Jesus' trajectory keeps going deeper.

In the common practice of faith, traditions have been central to its heritage and thus not considered optional in practice. On this basis, the Pharisees and some scribes confront Jesus, "Why don't your disciples live according to the tradition of the elders, instead of eating with unwashed hands?" Observing tradition is a key identity marker for them, the function of which has become an end in itself rather than the means for their faith to be more deeply involved with God. So, Jesus counters by getting to the underlying function of their faith practice: "Why do you essentially break God's commandment (i.e., relational terms) because of your tradition? You hold on to human tradition faithfully while effectively abandoning the command of God. You have a subtle way of invalidating God's terms for relationship together in order to maintain your tradition! That is to say, you render the words of God silent and thus no longer communicated to you, in order for your tradition to be given priority and transmitted generation to generation. You have become hypocrites role-playing your faith. Isaiah prophesied correctly about your function from outer in to expose your role-playing:

‘This people honors me with their lips,
but their heart is far from me.
They worship of me is composed only by rules
taught as doctrine by human commands’ (Isa 29:13).”

Whether formal or informal, tradition has become a pervasive function to define the identity of God’s people, and thereby serves their end. This function then determines how God is engaged at a relational distance and how faith is practiced with role-playing. This is how God’s relational terms are reduced to function without relational significance, and how they are renegotiated even with good intentions to render the involvement of Christians and churches to subtle relational distance, disconnection or detachment. And the relational consequence is rarely recognized because the feedback from the Word of God is rendered silent.

After his feedback to the Pharisees and scribes, Jesus addresses the crowd, “Listen to me, all of you, and understand. It is not what goes into the mouth from outside that defiles a person, but the things that come out of a person’s mouth are what defile a person.” Then the disciples report to him, “Do you know that the Pharisees took offense when they heard what you said?” He answers without flinching, “I expect such a reaction. My feedback’s purpose is to clarify and correct how people function, which would only be received by those who will change. Every plant that my heavenly Father didn’t plant will be uprooted. So, leave them alone! They are simply blind guides. And if the blind guide the blind, both will fall into a pit.”

Then his disciples ask him to clarify the parable. He responds with disappointment, “Do you still lack understanding? Don’t you realized that whatever goes into the mouth doesn’t go into a person’s heart but into the stomach and is then eliminated into the toilet. But what comes out of the mouth comes from the heart; and these are the sins of reductionism that defile a person, which should not be confused with eating with unwashed hands. So, always distinguish your function with the inner out and not by the common’s outer in prevailing all around you. And don’t let outer-in influences surrounding you shape your identity and function.” No matter how strongly he shares his feelings, his warning about their function has yet to change them from inner out.

Jesus gets up and departs from there to the region of Tyre and Sidon. He enters a house and doesn’t want anyone to know it. But he cannot escape notice as usual, which always puts pressure on him and strains him at times. Just then a Gentile woman comes, falls at his feet and cries out, “Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David! My little daughter is severely tormented by a demon.” His disciples urge him, “Send her away because she’s crying out after us.” This reflects their bias that makes outer-in distinctions among people, notably between Jews and Gentiles. Ironically, Jesus appears to make the same distinction when he responds to her plea for help and says, “Let the children be fed

first, because it isn't right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs." This didn't reflect his feelings because his heart does not engage in the rejection underlying such discrimination. Rather he is testing how deep her request to him goes. She responds vulnerably from her heart, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs under the table eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table." That's what Jesus is hoping to hear and wants to see from her: "Woman, your trust in me is great. It is fulfilled for you as you desire from your heart." When she goes back to her home, she finds her child lying on the bed, and the demon is gone.

Jesus' trajectory navigates a narrow path that is framed by the priorities constituting the strategic, tactical and functional shifts of God's trajectory. Communicating the Word of God to the Jews was an initial priority at the exclusion of the Gentiles to construct an either-or trajectory. But God makes no distinctions between them, so Jesus' trajectory is only constituted 'both-and' and is enacted on no other basis. The trajectory of Christians and churches may be framed by the same priorities but in function are not constituted by them to encompass, reconcile and integrate both-and. If the trajectory of their identity and function is to be in likeness of Jesus', it can only be constituted without the common distinctions of the world and also must be enacted inclusively of all persons, peoples, tribes, nations and their related languages. This is the heart-level function that Jesus' trajectory keeps enacting for the relational outcomes of nothing less and no substitutes. Therefore, Christians and churches need to scrutinize the measure used for their trajectory.

Moving on from there, Jesus passes along the Sea of Galilee. As the crowds come to him, he continues to heal those suffering various disabilities. He also is getting more affected by his twelve disciples, becoming frustrated with their lack of understanding due to not being vulnerably involved with him with their hearts, and getting angry with them for the measures they use to define their and his identity as well as determine their and his function.

Since Jesus has compassion for the crowd, he reenacts how he fed the 5,000 earlier to now feed the 4,000. After completing this and dismissing the crowd, he and his disciples get into a boat and go to the region of Magadan. At that point, the Pharisees and Sadducees come and begin to argue with him, demanding of him a sign from heaven to test him. This tries Jesus' tolerance and his heart sighs deeply in dismay: "Why does this generation demand a sign? I tell you openly and directly, no sign will be given to this generation." Then he leaves them, gets back into the boat with his disciples and goes to the other side.

The disciples forget to bring bread along with them, except for the one loaf left in the boat. As they're going, he gives his disciples a strong warning and strict imperative: "Be careful! Watch out for the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees, because their

influence permeates those not discerning.” Since the disciples were discussing not having brought any bread with them, they make wrong assumptions about his words. In conscious awareness of this, he shares his anger with them: “You of little faith. Why are you discussing the fact you have no bread to feed us? Do you have hardened hearts? Do you have eyes and not see; do you have ears and not hear? Why don’t you understand yet from what you directly experienced firsthand with the 5,000 and the 4,000?” His feelings are justified and become the basis for how he will address their function from here on. His heart will not remain within the limits and constraints either of their expectations of him, or of their good intentions in how they are. His heart will resonate unmistakably for them to know his feelings.

When Jesus comes to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he shares his curiosity with his disciples, “Who do people say that I am?” they answer, “John the Baptist, others say Elijah; still others, Jeremiah or one of the ancient prophets has come back.” What he really wants to know is, “But you, who do you say that I am?” Peter answers from his mindset, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” His view isn’t a conclusion that he has thought through; rather “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, because human reasoning did not reveal this to you but my Father in heaven.” Then, he highlights Peter’s coming ministry and the role he will have in the development of the church. This must have stirred in Peter’s mind, yet his excitement will be short-lived as his mindset is about to be exposed at its roots.

From then on Jesus emphasizes to his disciples that it is necessary for him to go to Jerusalem and suffer many things, be rejected by the elders, chief priests and scribes, be killed, and be raised the third day. Hearing that riles Peter up, so he takes Jesus aside and begins to rebuke him intensely: “Oh no it won’t, Lord! This will never happen to you, the Messiah!” Peter’s mindset of the Messiah is only of a victorious leader who would never be defeated. Peter’s overt action precipitates the angry intolerance from Jesus that will get to the heart and leave nothing unsaid to Peter: “Get behind me, Satan, you renegade! You, you yourself, are a hindrance to me, because you’re not focused on God’s concerns but your human concerns. Make no mistake about your bias.”

At that point, he makes it clear about human bias to his disciples and the crowd: “If anyone wants to follow after my person, let that person deny their self-interests, take up their cross by dying to the old in them, and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life as the priority will lose it, but whoever lets go of that priority because of me will find that fulfillment. For what will it benefit someone if they gain the whole world yet lose what’s primary about life? Or what can anyone give in exchange for the qualitative whole of their life from inner out?”

After six days Jesus takes Peter, James and John and leads them up a high mountain by themselves to be alone to pray. As he is praying, the appearance of his face changes beyond a normal glow and his clothes become dazzling white. In this transfigured state, two men are talking with him—Moses and Elijah. The three disciples

are in a deep sleep, and when they become fully awake, they are startled to see his unique glory and the two men standing with him. As the two men are leaving, Peter says to Jesus, without knowing what he is really saying since they are terrified: “Master, it’s good for us to be here. Let’s set up three shelters: one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.”

While Peter is still speaking, suddenly a bright cloud envelops them, and a voice comes from the cloud: “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased. Listen to him!” When the disciples hear this, they fall face down even more terrified. Jesus then warmly comes to them and tenderly touches them saying, “Get up, don’t be afraid of the intimate connections you just witnessed.” As they look up, they see no one except Jesus alone.

As they are coming down the mountain, he orders them with mixed feelings in his heart, “Don’t tell anyone about this unique vision until the Son of Man has risen from the dead.” They keep this to themselves, confused about what “rising from the dead” means. Then they finally ask him, “Why do the scribes say that Elijah must come first.” To clarify the facts of what’s happening, he states clearly, “Elijah does come first and restores everything. But I report the existential reality that Elijah has already come. And they didn’t recognize him, so in their bias they did whatever they pleased against him. In the same way, the Son of Man is going to suffer at their hands.” Then it became clear to the disciples that he has spoken to them about John the Baptist, his forerunner. But they still didn’t understand about Jesus’ painful death and rising from the dead. This amplifies his feelings and increasingly weighs on his heart.

As his trajectory progresses, one of Jesus’ top priorities is to develop the disciples in his qualitative image and functional likeness. This development does not progress smoothly, because the process is a relational process dependent on the disciples vulnerable reciprocal involvement. Their variable function in relationship together continues to be a major source of frustration for Jesus, which he ongoingly addresses with them.

After they come down from the mountain and join the rest of the disciples, a man from the crowd around them cries out for Jesus, “Teacher, I now bring my son to you because he is deeply affected by a demon spirit. I begged your disciples to drive it out, but they couldn’t.” Jesus throws his hands up and shakes his head in dismay, “You unbelieving generation, how long will I be with you and have to put up with you?” Then he rebukes the unclean spirit, heals the boy, and give him back to his father. Afterward, Jesus goes into the house, and his disciples ask him privately, “Why couldn’t we drive it out?” He says straight to their faces, “Because of your little faith. For the truth is, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will tell this mountain, ‘Move from here to there’ and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you. But take to heart, that faith is only the relational involvement of vulnerable trust in me in reciprocal relationship together.”

Then they leave that place and make their way through Galilee. Jesus shares his feelings further with the disciples: “Let these words sink in deeper than merely going into your ears. The Son of Man is about to be betrayed into the hands of men. They will kill him and after that he will rise three days later.” But they don’t understand what he shared; and they keep their relational distance from him because they are afraid to ask him—once again, not be vulnerably involved with him. How they function is consequential to their development and will need to be turned around for their identity and function to be of significance to Jesus.

When Jesus is in a house in Capernaum, he asks his disciples, “What were you arguing about on the way?” But in their relational distance they remain silent, because on the way they had been arguing with one another about who among them is the greatest. Knowing their thoughts, however, Jesus addresses them directly in their outer-in concerns about how they define their identity and the underlying issue of the competing process of their comparative distinctions: “If anyone wants to be first, they must redefine their identity from the inner out and thereby function to serve everyone without outer-in distinctions.” He calls a small child and has the person stand among them. Taking the child into his arms, he states firmly; “Here is the inner-out truth and reality of life: Unless you turn around and become like little children who have not formed outer-in distinctions, you will not belong to the kingdom of God. Therefore, whoever humbles themselves from inner out like this child without distinctions, that person is the greatest in God’s family. And whoever embraces this child in my likeness on these inner-out terms, also embraces me and him who sent me for relationship together as family.” (Be clarified that Jesus does not reverse the stratified infrastructure prevailing in the common world, but he transforms its outer-in basis to inner out.)

John interjects a concern to him, “Teacher, we saw someone driving out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him because he wasn’t following us”—even though the disciples couldn’t cast out demons earlier. Jesus retorts immediately, “Don’t stop him because whoever is not against us is for us, period. But, on the other hand, whoever causes one of these little ones who trust in me to fall away, well, it would be better for them if a heavy millstone were hung around their neck and they were thrown into the sea. Woe to the world because of such influential function, which inevitably exists in surrounding contexts. But woe to that person by whom such function is enacted. Therefore, if any part of you is shaped by this function to reduce your person, then it is imperative for that part of you to die, so the new will rise to define your identity and determine your function.”

“Now if your brother or sister engages in sin of reductionism, make the choice from your heart to tell them how they are wrong. If they listen to you, you have helped them to turn around. But if they won’t listen to or agree with you, bring one or two others in to help support your concern for how they live. If they still will not turn around,

then bring in the church's support. Then if they still don't submit to the fellowship of believers, let them merely continue in the identity and function of the surrounding context of their real belonging. If you gather together in support of one another, be assured that I am always involved with you at that time in that supporting way."

Peter then raises the issue, "Lord, how many times must I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me.? As many as seven times?" He is obviously focused on a quantitative measure, but Jesus responds back qualitatively with the primacy of relationship: "I tell you unequivocally, not as many as seven but seventy times seven." In other words, Jesus isn't discussing to what extent contrarian relationship can be tolerated, but he focuses on how often relationships can come together and be reconciled; and those who follow him need to respond to others just as he has responded ongoingly to them by forgiving "70 x 7."

As the functional shift of his trajectory keeps going deeper, Jesus builds on the foundation of his discipleship manifesto that he made definitive in the Sermon on the Mount. So, when a scribe professes to him, "Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go." Jesus tells him frankly, "Foxes have dens, and birds of the sky have nests, but the Son of Man has no place in the surrounding context for even his head to lay and thus belong." This scribe is surprised, if not shocked, because he never heard this before from any of his previous teachers. Then Jesus says to another potential disciple, "Follow me." He answers, "OK, Lord, first let me go bury my father." Jesus also tells him firmly, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you, make following me the priority and spread the news of the kingdom of God." Another one claims, "I will follow you, Lord, but first let me go and say good-bye to my biological family." But Jesus makes his discipleship terms clear to him, "No one who puts their hand to the plow and looks back distracted is suitable for the kingdom of God."

What Jesus wants all of his followers to understand and thus discern in themselves are the functional simulations that appear to be following him but are only illusions. Therefore, he always exposes any of this subtlety, which is commonly based on an incomplete profile of his person. The profile of Jesus used in "Follow me" is composed by a lens perceiving "me" either with nothing less and no substitutes or with anything less and any substitutes.

Without equivocation, even without apology, Jesus further distinguishes his disciples in an *uncommon* discipleship, which is in contrast to and conflict with the *common* practiced pervasively in the surrounding contexts. This conflict emerges further with his own biological family. The Jewish Festival of Tabernacles is near, and his brothers want to discount him as a fraud. So, they pressure him, "Leave here and go to Judea so that your disciples can see your works that you are doing. For no one does anything in secret while he's seeking public recognition. If you in fact do these things, show yourself to the world." Their skepticism exposes their disbelief in their own brother. Jesus doesn't confront them but simply states the bigger picture: "My time has

not yet arrived, but for you any time is right. The world cannot hate you since you belong. But it does hate me because I testify about it—that its works are evil, in conflict with mine. So, go up to the festival yourselves and be among your kind. I'm not going to this festival, because my time has not yet fully come."

After his brothers have gone up to the festival, Jesus has his own plan that he implements secretly. The Jews are looking for him at the festival, because they want to take him into custody. Jesus arrives at the festival secretly, and when the festival is already half over, he goes into the temple and begins to teach. The Jews are taken aback, bewildered, "How is this man so learned, since he hasn't been trained?"

Jesus speaks to the issue to get to the heart of the matter: "My teaching is not my own doing but is from the one who sent me. If anyone chooses to do God's will, they will know for sure whether the teaching is from God or if I merely speak on my own. The one who speaks on his own seeks his own glory; but he who seeks the glory of the one who sent him is a person of truth—nothing false about him. Now didn't Moses give you the law from God. Yet, none of you really keeps the heart of the law from inner out, but just observe it from outer in. Is that not why you are trying to kill me, so I can no longer expose your ways?"

With denial they shout, "You have a demon! Who is trying to kill you?" And this divisive context intensifies. Jesus rebuts them to silence all their accusations. Still, they try to seize him, but no one lays a hand on him because his hour has not yet come. Even the temple guards, sent by the chief priests and Pharisees to arrest him, come back empty-handed, taken aback by his words, "No one ever spoke the way this man does!"

Another incident happens that Jesus uses to make emphatic the function of God's law from inner out contrary to merely observing it from outer in. When he begins to teach again at the temple, the scribes and Pharisees bring a woman caught in adultery, making her stand in the center. Motivated by their desire to gain evidence to accuse him, they set up this scheme: "Teacher, in the law Moses commanded us to stone such women. So, what do you say?"

Jesus stoops down and starts writing on the ground with his finger. When they persist in questioning him, he stands up and puts the burden on them to act: "The one without sin among you should be the first to throw a stone at her." Then he stoops down again and continues writing on the ground. When they hear this challenge, they leave one by one, starting with the older men. Only Jesus is left, with the woman in the center. As he stands up, he says to her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" "No one, Lord," she answers. Jesus responds tenderly, "Neither do I condemn you because of God's grace. So, turn around and from now on do not sin anymore."

Jesus thwarts all their efforts to trap him, not because he is smarter than any of them but simply because they are wrong and he is right. Yet, the issue isn't about who is right but about the functional significance of the person's integrity before God, with God and for God.

The verbal battle between them continues, in which Jesus sharply contrasts with them. “I am the light of the world. Anyone who follows me will never walk in the darkness but will have the light of life.” The Pharisees challenge him, “Here you are appearing as your own witness; your testimony is not valid.” Jesus states with clarity, “Even if I testify on my own behalf, my testimony is valid, for I know where I came from and where I’m going. But you have no idea where I come from or where I am going. You judge by human standards. I judge no one with that bias. When I judge, my assessments are correct, because it is not I alone who judge but I stand with the Father who sent me. Even in your own law it is written that the testimony of two witnesses is valid. I am the one who testifies about myself, and my other witness is the Father who sent me.”

Then they fire back, “Where is your Father?” Jesus starts to vulnerably reveal his whole person from inner out, “You know neither me nor my Father. If you knew me, then you would also know my Father. We are inseparable in who, what and how we are!”

Later, he says to them again, “I’m going away; you will look for me, and you will die in your sin. Where I’m going, you cannot come.” Puzzled, the Jews deliberate, “Will he kill himself? Is that why he says, ‘Where I go, you cannot come’?” Jesus further reveals the contrast between them: “You are from the common context below, I am from the uncommon context above. You belong to this world, I don’t belong to it. Therefore, I told you that you will die in your sins. Indeed, if you do not believe that I am who I claim to be, you will die in your sins.”

All they could say is “Who are you?” Then he vulnerably reveals the heart of his person, “Exactly who and what I have been claiming all along. I have a comprehensive critique of you and your biased views, but since the one who sent me is irrefutable, I will elaborate for the world only what I have heard from him.” They don’t comprehend he is speaking to them about his Father. So, Jesus lays bare his heart: “When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am nothing less than my claim, and that I enact nothing on my own. But just as the Father has taught me, I only teach these things with no substitutes. My Father who sent me is intimately with me; he has not left me alone—to be on my own—for I always fulfill what pleases him.”

As his heart touches those really listening, many believe in him. Then, with affirmation, Jesus responds to the Jews who believe him, “If you embrace the relational terms of my teaching and don’t reinterpret my word, then you are really my disciples. Thus, you will know the experiential truth I embody, and the relational reality of the Truth will set you free.”

This strikes a dissonant chord in others, who raise discord in reaction, “We are descendants of Abraham, and we have never been enslaved to anyone. How can you say that we shall be set free?”

Jesus responds with a penetrating critique that gets to the underlying problem. “This is the existential reality, even if you deny it. Everyone who commits sin belongs to it forever. So if I, the Son, sets you free from your enslavement to sin, you will be free indeed. I know, on the one hand, you are Abraham’s descendants. Yet you are trying to kill me, because with your bias you cannot embrace my word. I communicate what I have seen in my Father’s presence. On the other hand, you do what you have heard from your father.”

“Our father is Abraham,” they reply confidently. Penetrating deeper, Jesus states as a matter of fact, “If you were Abraham’s children, then you would do what Abraham did. As it is, you are determined to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. Abraham did not do such things. The fact is, you are doing what your actual father does.” They protest, “We are not illegitimate children. The only father we have is God himself.”

“Is that right! If God were your Father, you would love me because I came directly from God to be here. I have not come on my own decision but only because he sent me. This begs the question, why don’t you understand what I say? Why? Because you cannot listen to my word communicated in relational language. This exposes that you belong to your father, Satan, and thus you want to carry out your father’s desires. He originated sin, which fragments life and reduces the truth with subtle deception that composes lies with the language of his own nature—for he is the father of lies. Yet, because I tell the truth, you do not believe me. Can any of you prove me guilty of sin? If I am indeed telling the truth, why don’t you believe me? Only the one who belongs to God listens to God’s words in relational language. Clearly, then, the reason you do not listen to me is that you don’t in fact belong to God but, at best, can only assume you do without basis.”

The need to be set free (redeemed) is dependent on one’s recognition of being enslaved. Deniers have to lie to avoid the fact of being tied to sin. Therefore, facing the truth is predicated on the full scope of sin as reductionism, not merely as disobedience or moral failure. The turnaround from all sin requires redemptive change, in which the old dies to be set free so that the new can rise in wholeness. This redemptive change is incomplete by merely gaining forgiveness of sin, which by itself is insufficient for redemption and inadequate for redemptive change—although anyone can be deceived by illusions and simulations of them. This makes imperative having a strong view of sin that encompasses reductionism and its counter-relational workings—which keeps evolving subtly from the primordial garden in the beginning.

These deniers react in full defensive mode, “Aren’t we right in saying that you’re a Samaritan and demon-possessed?” Jesus rebuts, “Another lie! I am not possessed by a demon. On the contrary, I honor my Father, but you dishonor me just as your father does.

The truth will come out. So, for anyone who adheres to my word, their person will never be terminated as yours will be.” The Jews react further, “Now we know for sure that you are demon-possessed. Abraham died and so did the prophets; yet you say that if anyone keeps your word, they will never taste death. Are you greater than Abraham? He died and so did the prophets. Who do you think you are?”

He replies with further intensity, “If I glorify myself, my glory means nothing. My Father, whom you claim as your God, is the one who glorifies me. You don’t know him, even if you think you do, but I know him. If I said I did not, I would be a liar like you saying you do. I know him intimately and keep his word with my whole person. Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad.”

The Jews fire back, “You aren’t fifty years old yet, and you’ve seen Abraham?” Jesus simply reveals the reality of this enduring truth, “Before Abraham was born, I am!” At this, they pick up stones to stone him, but he eludes them without their awareness.

As Jesus’ trajectory deepens, the inequality among the constituents brings out the inequity of the infrastructure in the surrounding contexts. When his disciples see a man blind from birth, they ask him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” Jesus clarifies, “Neither this man nor his parents sinned. This came about so that the work of God would be displayed in his life. Be alerted, we must do the relational work of him who sent me while there’s still daylight. Night is coming when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.”

Then, on this Sabbath day, Jesus then heals the man, who surprisingly has to confirm to others that he was blind—moreover that Jesus was the one who healed him. This restored man endures a demeaning process that sustains his social status lacking dignity. Finally, when he affirms Jesus to these skeptics to enlighten them, they react abusively, “You were born entirely in sin. How dare you lecture us!”—and they throw him out like some trash. When Jesus hears that they have thrown the man out, he pursues the man and warmly asks, “Do you believe in the Son of God?” In his excitement, the man responds, “Who is he, Sir? Tell me so that I may believe in him.” The man hears the resonating words, “You have seen him; in fact, he is the one speaking with you.” Humbled and touched, “Lord, I believe,” as he worships Jesus.

Then Jesus declares, “Part of my trajectory into this world is for judgment, in order that those who essentially do not see will now see, so that those who think they see will effectively become blind.” Some of the Pharisees who are with him hear him say this without any resounding in their ears, and they query him, “We aren’t blind too, are we?” With reverberating words Jesus tells them, “If you were blind, you wouldn’t be tied to sin. But now that you claim you can see, you remain a slave of sin.”

As the light, Jesus further distinguishes those truly belonging to God, illuminated by the analogy of sheep. “Anyone who doesn’t enter the sheep pen by the gate but climbs in some other way is one who fragments and reduces the herd. Contrary to that,

the one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. The gatekeeper opens it for him and the sheep listen to his voice, paying attention because he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out together. When he has brought all his own outside, he goes ahead of them. His sheep follow him together as one because they know his voice. But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they don't recognize the voice of strangers." Those gathered around him, however, do not understand what he is telling them.

Jesus clarifies his words and thereby illuminates his trajectory contrary to others. "I am the gate for the sheep. All who came before me functioned to fragment and reduce those gathered together. But the sheep didn't listen to them. In my function as the gate, whoever enters through me will be saved and belong together. Others function in contrarian ways that counter belonging together, though they may simulate it and have illusions about its integrity. I have come so that they may have life together and have it in wholeness as one."

Moreover, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives his life for the sake of the sheep. The hired hand is not the shepherd who owns the sheep. So, when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away to avoid any consequences to himself. This happens because he is merely an employee with no investment to care for the sheep."

"Most important for my function, I am the good shepherd distinguished in relational terms by the primacy of relationship together in wholeness. I know my own and my own know me—just as the Father knows me intimately and I know the Father, because we are whole together as One. On this relational basis and for this relational purpose, I give up my life for those belonging to me—my heart is theirs, vulnerably opened for intimate connection as family together. But in this fragmentary world embedded in inequality and shrouded with inequity, there are other sheep I have that are not from this sheep pen. I must gather them together also from these other contexts, and they will listen to my voice. Then the relational outcome will be one flock with one shepherd. My vulnerably enacting my identity and function in wholeness to fulfill this purpose is why the Father loves me. I give my life to no other priority, which results from exercising my volition from my heart." This function is the agency all humans have, who are created in his likeness.

As expected, the Jews are divided because of his words. Many still claim he has a demon, and "He is crazy, why do you listen to him?" But others insist, "These could not be the words of someone who is demon-possessed. Also, can a demon open the eyes of the blind?" With a biased lens, many false claims are made against Jesus. A biased lens of Jesus' words even divides those favorable to him, because for one reason or another not all of his words are listened to—a selective process likely to serve one's particular interests. Any selective process results in God's relational terms being subject to one's own terms, which are diversely shaped by surrounding contexts.

Given that Jesus' days embodied on earth will not be much longer, he develops his disciples to take over his purpose based on relational terms. He appoints 72 disciples and sends them in pairs ahead of him to every town and place where he himself is about to go. He instructs them passionately: "The harvest is abundant but the workers are few. Therefore, pray ongoingly and ask the Lord of the harvest to send out committed workers into his harvest. Now go forth and be consciously aware that I'm sending you out like lambs among wolves. You have to assert your persons in what's primary, but don't worry about secondary things, but simply adjust to the surrounding contexts for your needs.

Adjusting is not the same as adapting to the lifestyle of the surrounding context to get what you want. Adapting is how human behavior evolves, the measures of which conflict with Jesus' terms for his disciples. The adaptive function results in reflecting, reinforcing and thereby sustaining the ways that have evolved in surrounding contexts. His disciples will only be compatible with his trajectory when they adjust to surrounding contexts and not, for example, assimilate into them. To be clearly distinguished has always been problematic for many Christians, especially in Western contexts.

Your priority is to heal the sick who are there and share with them in relational terms 'The kingdom of God is here for you'. If they reject you, clarify the consequences for them. Whoever listens to you listens to me. Whoever rejects you rejects me. And whoever rejects me rejects the one who sent me."

Later, the 72 disciples return joyfully and report in their excitement, "Lord even the demons submit to us as we invoked your name in our trust of you." Jesus thankfully settles them down, "Don't be surprised. I have given you the authority to subdue all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you. However, don't rejoice that the spirits submit to you and get distracted by power relations; rather, celebrate the relational reality that you belong permanently in God's family."

Then, in the primacy of relationship together, Jesus gets excited in the Holy Spirit and shares while dancing, "I joyfully and thankfully affirm you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these primary matters essential to my words, hid them from the intelligent and educated to discover in their biased lenses, and then revealed their full significance to persons vulnerably opening their hearts to you like little children trusting in what you say. Oh my! Yes, indeed, Father, because this was pleasing in your sight. And in your good pleasure, all things have been entrusted to me." Then, further revealing his heart to his disciples, he adds, "No one deeply knows who the Son is except the Father; likewise, no one fully knows who the Father is except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him." In other words, reason alone is never sufficient to gain this depth of knowledge and intimate understanding.

Having said this, he privately affirms his disciples to confirm the unique relationship they enjoy together: “Blessed are the eyes that see the inner-out things you see! Believe me, many prophets and kings wanted to see what you see but never saw it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it.” This relational basis and its ongoing relational process will prepare and develop his disciples to extend his trajectory into the world.

In another interaction, Jesus clarifies and corrects the function necessary to live by God’s terms for wholeness. An expert of the law stands up to test him, “Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus tests him right back, “What is written in the law? How do you read it?” Ironically, this expert answers, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind; and love your neighbor as yourself.” Jesus tells him pointedly, “You’ve answered with the correct words of the law. Now function by these relational terms and you will live whole.”

But the expert exposes his biased lens focused merely on function from the outer in, and on this shallow basis he wants to prove himself right. So, he asks, “Who is my neighbor?” Jesus then responds with the function necessary to fulfill the relational terms of God’s law by highlighting a loving Samaritan. This person distinguishes the relational involvement and response essential to the basic function of love according to God’s relational terms. Jesus wants it understood that only the vulnerable heart of the person enacts love as defined by God, and that this heart function also makes vulnerable the neighbor receiving this love. Moreover, fulfilling the relational function of the terms for relationship in God’s law is enacted neither in a vacuum nor detached from the surrounding context. Therefore, by making the heart of his person vulnerable to others regardless of their status, by implication this loving Samaritan (1) addresses the inequality that defines him and neighbors in comparative relations, and (2) counters the inequity of the surrounding context.

When the expert of the law acknowledges the love of the Samaritan, Jesus tells him emphatically, “Go and function vulnerably in the same way—with nothing less and no substitutes for the heart of your person.”

While Jesus and his disciples are traveling, he enters a village where a woman named Martha welcomes him into her house. This occasion will be a pivotal point in his trajectory, as the functional shift most significantly penetrates the surrounding sociocultural infrastructure to set apart (i.e., make uncommon) the discipleship of his disciples as never before. The following dynamics are critical to understand, which will require an open mind and vulnerable heart.

Martha has a sister named Mary, who is about to turn the infrastructure and its tradition upside down. As expected, Martha enacts her role to prepare the food to serve Jesus and his disciples. But Mary steps away from her expected role and boldly engages Jesus by sitting at the Lord’s feet along with the other disciples, in order to listen directly to his words of teaching—a place commonly reserved for males as rabbinic tradition

required. Her action must have flabbergasted the other disciples, but no one intervened to stop Mary's direct relational involvement with Jesus. Martha, of course, is engaged in hospitality, which has a significant function but renders her to only indirect involvement with Jesus. On the basis of her secondary (though important) function, seeing Mary's action she complains to Jesus directly, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do all this work by myself? Tell her to get back to where she belongs and help me!"

Jesus responds to Martha warmly and with concern, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and upset about many things, but I want you to know clearly that only one thing is necessarily primary. Mary has chosen what is best—regardless if it offends your tradition or counters the surrounding infrastructure—and that outcome will not be taken away from her."

Jesus wants Martha to learn this vital distinction: Even though she willfully extended hospitality to all of them, which he appreciates, she does not extend her person to him to be directly involved in relationship together—the primacy of relationship that hospitality can never supplant or substitute for. In other words, Martha keeps her person at a relational distance from him, which requires less vulnerability from her. In contrast and thus in conflict with Martha, Mary connects with him directly person to person by extending her person to be vulnerably involved with Jesus, her Lord and Teacher.

From this most significant relational connection, even more unprecedented outcomes will unfold ahead with, by, and for Jesus—outcomes which will declare unequivocally the relational primacy composing his gospel in its outcomes for the church. Jesus will be at the center of these outcomes, both with Mary and with others whose hearts are also vulnerably involved with him in reciprocal relationship together.

Chapter 4

His Outcomes

**“She has been intimately involved with me to enact
a beautiful response to me, touching my whole person.”**

Matthew 26:10

“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

Matthew 27:46

The affective narrative revealing vulnerably the heart of Jesus’ whole person intensifies even more to magnify integrally the outcomes embodied from his identity and enacted from his function. Constituted by the righteous nature of who, what and how he is, these outcomes will unfold at the depth of the interpersonal level as well as the personal level.

Before the outcomes in his trajectory unfold, Jesus is emphatic in clarifying that they do not, will not and cannot result from common illusions of faith and prevailing simulations of its practice. As Jesus continues through towns and villages, teaching, healing and making his way to Jerusalem, someone asks him, “Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?” He responds with an uncommon measure of exclusive parameters: “You do not have the option of a variable way but you must enter through the narrow door; I counsel you, many will try to enter and won’t be able to on their terms. Once the Master shuts this door to close off any way inside, you will stand outside knocking and pleading, ‘Lord, open the door for us!’ But he will answer unequivocally ‘I don’t know you or where you’re coming from.’ Then you will testify, ‘We ate and drank with you in the same context, and you taught in our streets.’ His emphatic reply, ‘You were not directly involved with me, my person, so I don’t know you from inner out. So, get away from me, all you engaged in misdeeds!’”

The reality is that there is no shortcut or wide approach to this relational outcome of his gospel and his terms for discipleship—no matter what activities are participated in together. Even with good intentions, we cannot claim to know a person just by knowing things about that person. A person is never known from inner out until we make our heart vulnerable from inner out to have heart-to-heart connection.

Many simulate following Jesus and are only associated with him. Moreover, many are embedded in illusions about their faith. As the Good Shepherd, Jesus laments over this reality: “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who silence the messengers from God,

how often I have longed to gather your children in relationship, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings. But you were not willing to make your heart vulnerable to me.”

Knowing each other from inner out, heart to heart, is the key to the narrow door of following Jesus; and this discipleship is nonnegotiable for this outcome. Anything less is consequential in not knowing each other. The Good Shepherd always knows his sheep intimately, because his heart is vulnerably involved with them ongoingly. Sadly, and to Jesus’ frustration, it becomes clear that after all the time they spent together, his twelve disciples still struggled to know his person from inner out—“And you still don’t know me” (Jn 14:9). This elusive outcome is consequential in their hearts yet to be fully vulnerable to him.

Jesus is emphatic, unequivocal and even unsettling about who can be his disciple, when he outlines contingencies for discipleship:

“If anyone wants to follow me and does not make, for example, their biological family—yes, even their own life—secondary to me, they cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not die to their self-interests down to their heart, cannot be my disciple.” That is to say, “you are accountable for fulfilling the contingencies for discipleship in order to come together with my person for relationship as my disciple. Therefore, no one else but you can bear this cost, which you then must seriously consider before making any claim to follow me.”

In other words, coming together with Jesus on his trajectory is only a relational process leading to reconciliation. And this reconciliation is the relational outcome that can unfold only from the redemptive change enabled by the heart of Jesus’ whole person. He embodies from inner out the experiential truth of this relational outcome, and he enacts heart to heart for this relational outcome to be the relational reality person to person. His interpersonal outcomes unfold measured only on the integral basis of his personal outcomes.

His Interpersonal Outcomes

Jesus enters Jericho and is passing through. A man is there by the name of Zaccheus, who is a chief tax collector and wealthy from his dealings. He is trying to see who Jesus is, but since he is a short man he can’t because of the crowd. His status doesn’t give him the privilege to be in front of the crowd, but in fact he is looked down upon and pushed aside. So, he runs ahead of the flow and climbs up a sycamore tree to see Jesus as he comes by.

When Jesus reaches Zaccheus' observation place, he surprisingly looks up directly at him and vulnerably shares, "Zaccheus, come down immediately, because I must by necessity (not obligation) stay at your house today." Zaccheus is flabbergasted but comes down quickly and openly welcomes him with joyful excitement that makes his heart vulnerable to Jesus. All the people observing this are shocked, if not dismayed, and complain, "He has gone to stay with a sinful outcast." Jesus initiates this connection for the purpose of redemptive change, so that this interpersonal outcome will impact the inequitable surrounding context and establish equality in God's family.

Signifying his turnaround change, Zaccheus stands up and responds vulnerably to Jesus heart to heart, "Look Lord, from this decisive point in my life forward I give half of my possessions to the poor, and where I have extorted anything from anyone, I will pay back four times the amount." Zaccheus' action makes clear that his redemptive change of the old Zaccheus dying so that the new Zaccheus can rise, constitutes the following interpersonal outcome that deeply touched Jesus' heart to then exclaim: "Today, being saved from sin and to wholeness has become a reality in this person, because his former self was rejected, denied belonging, but now his whole person is a son of Abraham, that is, fully belonging in God's family. This interpersonal outcome is a relational reality because the Son of Man has come to seek and to save those fragmented by the human relational condition prevailing in the world and pervading even among the descendants of Abraham." Zaccheus signifies a pivotal outcome that equalizes those belonging in God's family in equitable intimate relationships together.

This human relational condition that earlier afflicted Zaccheus fragments Jesus' followers into partisan views, the condition which pervades even the church of his name—all of which is consequential in reinforcing and sustaining the injustices in the surrounding context, and thus in direct conflict with the outcome of Jesus bringing justice to victory (Mt 12:20). The reality of this existing condition prevents the interpersonal outcomes that Jesus enacted in the experiential truth of the process for redemptive reconciliation. Therefore, the only means to this relational outcome is redemptive change; and Jesus would have to critique anything less and any substitutes assumed to make this outcome a relational reality, in order to turn existential conditions around by redemptive change. The narrative of his critique unfolds in his post-ascension feedback with the Spirit (discussed in the next chapter).

An earlier interaction demonstrates the relational process involved in Jesus' interpersonal outcomes. Back in Bethany, Martha and Mary's brother Lazarus becomes very sick and near death. When Jesus hears about this, his heart is stirred because he loves this family very much. He says confidently, "This sickness will not end in death.

No, it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it." Yet, even though Lazarus and his sisters are special to him, he nevertheless stays two more days in the place where he is. Finally, he says to his disciples, "Let's go back quickly to Judea." The disciples raise another issue of concern to them, "Rabbi, just a short while ago the Jews tried to stone you, and yet you're going back there?"

Then, Jesus vulnerably shares his feelings with them of his close affection for this family, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I'm going there to wake him up." Not understanding where Jesus is coming from, his disciples reply, "Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will get well." Jesus doesn't agree with their pessimism about his welfare, or the optimism about Lazarus. So, he then tells them clearly, "Lazarus has died, and for your sake I'm glad I wasn't there, so that you may believe more deeply. But now let's go to him for this interpersonal outcome to be fulfilled." At that point, Thomas (called Didymus) says from his predisposed bias to the other disciples, "OK, let's go also so that we may die with him."

When Jesus arrives at Bethany, he hears that Lazarus has already been in the tomb for four days. Since Bethany is only two miles from Jerusalem, many Jews have come to comfort Martha and Mary in the loss of their brother. As soon as Martha hears that Jesus is coming, she goes out to meet him, but Mary remains seated at home. The following interactions take place, which lead to their interpersonal outcomes.

When Martha comes together with Jesus, she starts to share her disappointment, "Lord if you had been here, my brother would not have died." Then she tempers her feelings by adding, "But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask." She doesn't share the feelings in her heart underlying those words. Jesus responds to her assuredly, "Your brother will rise again." Keeping her heart distant from Jesus, Martha just says from the cerebral level, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day"—which demonstrates her belief in the information heard from Jesus before. Knowing that Martha merely expresses an intellectual belief, Jesus tenderly challenges her: "I, my person, am the resurrection and the life. The ones who trust in me with their hearts, even if they die, will live. Everyone who lives from inner out and thereby trusts in me will never die. Do you, Martha, believe deeply enough to make your heart vulnerable in trust of my person from inner out?" Martha simply replies, "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who was to come into the world"—thus limiting the interpersonal outcome between them, leaving Jesus disappointed, if not hurt, because his interpersonal outcomes unfold from person-to-person, heart-to-heart relational involvement.

Having said this without going deeper, she goes back and calls her sister Mary, saying in private, "The Teacher [using a less personal title] is here and is asking for you." As soon as Mary hears this, she jumps up immediately and runs to him. When the Jews, who are in the house comforting her, see how quickly she leaves, they follow her, thinking that she is going to Lazarus' tomb to cry there.

In deeper contrast to Martha than at the dinner earlier, when Mary sees Jesus, she falls at his feet and pours her heart out crying, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” Even saying the same words as Martha, the contrast is obvious, especially to Jesus. When Jesus sees her bawling, his heart is deeply moved and stirred up like never seen before. He then asks the Jews crying along side of Mary, “Where have you laid him?” They reply “Come and see, Lord,” as Jesus weeps profusely. The Jews then say to one another, “See how much he loved Lazarus.” But some of them say, “Couldn’t he who opened the blind man’s eyes also have kept Lazarus from dying?”—a valid assumption swirling in Mary and Martha.

Then Jesus comes to the tomb as his feelings can’t be contained. A stone covered the opening of the cave tomb, so Jesus strongly directs others, “Take away the stone.” When Martha hears him, as a further indication of her level of belief in him, she retorts, “But Lord, there is already a very bad odor because he has been dead four days.” Jesus confronts where Martha is—distracted by secondary circumstances at the expense of the primary. “Didn’t I tell you that if you trust in me with your heart, not just believe in your mind, you will experience the outcome of the heart of God?” Mary, however, likely anticipated the outcome about to unfold, which she wanted from Jesus from the beginning.

So they take away the stone. Then, with intimate connection with the heart of the Father, Jesus’ heart pours out, “Lazarus, come out!”—and his relational outcome is fulfilled. This also sets into motion the final stages of his personal outcome soon to unfold.

Another interaction takes place earlier in a village to distinguish the relational process of his interpersonal outcomes from those results experienced centered on situations and circumstances. Ten men with leprosy approach him from a distance and shout out, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!” When he sees them, he responds compassionately, “Go and show yourselves to the priests.” And as they are going, they are cleansed, which obviously makes all of them happy with satisfaction. But one of them, upon seeing that he is healed, returns to Jesus praising God with a loud voice. Making his heart vulnerable, he falls face down at Jesus’ feet, sharing his deepest feelings of thanks to him. Notably, he is a Samaritan, which doesn’t elude Jesus’ awareness.

Then Jesus shares his feelings of disappointment and also joy, “Were not all ten cleansed? So, where are the other nine? Why don’t the others return also to give their praise to God just like this foreigner, who is considered *less* among the Jews?” Then, he shares warmly with the Samaritan, “Rise anew because the faith from your heart has this outcome that makes you well in wholeness.” In other words, the Samaritan experiences Jesus’ interpersonal outcome heart to heart, while the others are constrained by the situation to experience, thus, only a limited result (however positive) in their circumstances, nothing more.

Later, little children are brought to Jesus in order for them to make relational connection with him. But the disciples see this as negative distraction and thus intervene to prevent such involvement with Jesus. Then Jesus' heart bursts, "Leave the little children alone, and don't try to block them from connecting with me, because, as I told you earlier, the kingdom of God belongs to persons whose hearts are vulnerably involved like a little child. So, I cannot emphasize enough the experiential truth that whoever is not involved in the kingdom of God with their heart like a child will not have the outcome of belonging in God's family as the relational reality." Then he warmly embraces the little children for this interpersonal outcome.

This elemental relational outcome will soon be further enacted after Jesus makes his triumphant entry uncommonly into Jerusalem to intensify his trajectory to his penultimate outcome. As he expands his function in the temple, the children lead the chorus, shouting "Hosanna to the Son of David." This offends the chief priests and the scribes, who protest to Jesus, "Do you hear what these children are saying?"—implying they don't have the knowledge to speak, namely in place of the educated like them. Building on his excitement before how God revealed his function to little children and not the wise and educated (Lk 10:21), Jesus shames those leaders by reminding them, "Have you never read, 'You have prepared praise to come from the mouth of infants and nursing babies'?" His interpersonal outcomes always silence the logic of the educated, who depend solely on their reason to determine their function.

Shortly, Jesus will forcefully clean out the temple of its discriminatory ways and inequitable structures, in order for the redemptive change necessary to unfold so that the interpersonal outcome "My house will be a house of prayerful relational involvement for all persons, peoples, tribes, nations and languages without any comparative distinctions" will be the relational reality.

Then, Jesus reveals urgently to his disciples, "You're aware that the Passover takes place after two days, and at that time the Son of Man will be handed over to be crucified." They are aware of the religious schedule, but they aren't conscious of this critical juncture in his life because they have yet to make their hearts fully vulnerable to him to be involved heart to heart.

At their Passover table fellowship, with his time getting short, Jesus wants them to experience intimately the heart of his whole person vulnerably involved with them by his love—the interpersonal outcome which they can always count on him for in relationship together person to person, heart to heart. So, he gets up from the meal, takes off his outer clothing and wraps a towel around his waist. Then, surprisingly, he begins to wash his disciples' feet, drying them tenderly with the towel tied around him.

Peter is shocked and says in disbelief to Jesus when it is his turn, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" Jesus answers pointing to his relational context, "Since you haven't listened carefully to my words and integrated them along the way, you don't realize now the significance of my actions, but when you do, you will understand."

The relational context that Jesus points to is the essential relational involvement that he made definitive in order to “Follow me,” which engages the relational process of being vulnerably involved “with my person where I am” (Jn 12:26). Therefore, only those vulnerably involved in this relational context and process with his person—not simply knowing his teachings or just his deeds, his example and things about him—will experience his interpersonal outcome as the relational reality of belonging to him. The Twelve have yet to be vulnerably involved with his person, so Jesus vulnerably enacts this unlikely relational process for their vulnerable involvement. That is to say, by making his person even more vulnerable to his disciples by washing their feet, they too are rendered vulnerable as does this intimate act.

Peter reacts defiantly, “No, you shall never wash my feet!” With empathy Jesus clarifies for Peter, “Unless you receive my person vulnerably before you by making your person vulnerable, you are not involved with ‘me, being where I am’.” But, Peter doesn’t listen carefully and thus doesn’t become vulnerable from inner out. With his biased outer-in lens, he replies (not submits), “OK Lord, not just my feet but my hands and my head as well”—obviously constrained by the outer in both for himself and for Jesus, which sustains the relational gap that Jesus’ vulnerable action seeks to close. Therefore, Jesus’ action and words are not directed to Peter only but to any and all who identify themselves as his followers.

In other words, washing their feet is not the essential function that Jesus wants from his disciples to do also. When he finishes washing their feet, he makes clear the relational action he just completed for the primacy of their function to be in his likeness—“following my person and being where I am.” He pursues them first to see if they learned anything yet, “Do you understand what I have enacted for you?” Then, he makes clear the uncommon relational process they just experienced of him making vulnerable the heart of his whole person, in order for them to be involved with him as never before, and thereby to function with one another in relationship together for nothing less than his interpersonal outcome:

“You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord’, and rightly so because that is my role and my title. But those are secondary things about me and do not define my person and determine my primary function. I make my whole person vulnerable to you for the only depth of relationship that matters, person to person, heart to heart. Therefore, this is the person in my likeness that I expect you to be, and the primary function I count on from you. Since you are nothing greater than me, your likeness will be blessed and satisfied with nothing less and no substitutes.”

Jesus' interpersonal outcomes are not circumstantial, and thus they do not happen disconnected from his relational context. Nor do they happen tangentially to his relational process, but they are always relational outcomes from vulnerable involvement person to person, heart to heart with him. This is the good news that constitutes *his* gospel, which is no longer good news when claimed and proclaimed without the essential vulnerable involvement directly in his relational context and process.

The relational measure used for constituting his gospel are magnified in an intimate relational involvement he has that is at the heart of the good news. And his affective narrative neither distorts nor misinforms the substance of this good news, which cannot be said for wherever the gospel is proclaimed throughout the world.

Six days before the Passover, Jesus is in Bethany at a dinner given in his honor at the house of Simon the leper. Lazarus is one of those sharing this table fellowship with him, while Martha stays at a distance in her role of serving. Mary, however, takes a jar of expensive perfume and intimately anoints his head and feet, then tenderly wipes his feet with her hair. The heart of her whole person is vulnerably poured out to Jesus at the level he never before experienced from another person. This touches the depths of his heart unlike any of his interactions with others, including the prostitute washing his feet.

When the disciples see her action—no doubt with Mary's earlier boldness sitting with them at Jesus' feet still in their memory—they are indignant, protesting, "Why has this perfume been wasted? For this perfume could have been sold for more than 300 days' wages and given to the poor." So, they begin to rebuke her harshly—perhaps partly from their unresolved anger still harbored over Mary's earlier boldness.

Jesus immediately corrects them about the primacy of his relational context and process, which requires their vulnerable involvement with him person to person, heart to heart—the essential priority over serving and all else, even caring for the poor. "Leave her alone, now! Why are you harassing her? Haven't you learned yet what is primary and what is only secondary? She has enacted a deeply beautiful response that embraces my heart at this important time. You always have the poor around you, so you can care for them at any time. But you won't always have me for such involvement. In her intimate response to my heart, she anoints my person in anticipation of my burial. This relational involvement and its interpersonal outcome in relationship together of wholeness is the good news constituting my gospel. Therefore, let my words be heeded:

Wherever and whenever the gospel is proclaimed throughout the world, her intimate heart-to-heart interpersonal involvement needs to be shared also in memory of her precedence, which brings the good news embodying the interpersonal outcome of my gospel."

During this week Jesus enacts the good news to make definitive his interpersonal outcome in the primacy of relationship together in wholeness. At their last table

fellowship together, Jesus shares a defining relational statement with his disciples that will be clarifying, confronting and correcting for all his followers, present and future:

“I will not leave you as orphans, that is, relational orphans, who are not redeemed from your old relational condition but adopted in the new relational condition belonging in my family as one of our very own. If you continue to be relationally involved with me ongoingly, you will never be relationally disconnected from the whole of God—the triune God whose Spirit will be vulnerably present and relationally involved with you in contrast to others at a relational distance. In addition, if you love me by your relational involvement, my Father will love you; and thereby our relational involvement, we will come to you directly and make our home together with you. This is not a baseless promise but shared with you directly from my Father, who sent me to you for this interpersonal outcome. Therefore, the Father, the Spirit and I, constituting the whole of God, is the ongoing relational basis for you not becoming relational orphans. Receive and embrace us person to person, heart to heart, and this interpersonal outcome will be your experiential truth and relational reality—nothing less and no substitutes.”

Later, on the cross Jesus takes defining action on his promise not to leave his followers as relational orphans. Likely the most affected persons witnessing his painful death are his mother Mary and his beloved disciple John. What will become of the widow Mary, whose oldest son Jesus has the traditional responsibility to take care of her. But, Jesus doesn't merely promise that his followers will be taken care of, which by itself is no guarantee against being a relational orphan. (Many households are filled with relational orphans.) No, first and foremost, Mary belongs to God's family, and that is the only relational context that would fulfill his promise.

So, in his painful condition Jesus expresses his heart, lovingly involved with Mary and John, to complete his interpersonal outcome for constituting his family—the good news embodying his gospel in the wholeness of family together. With the deepest involvement of love, he shares with his mother, “Mary, my dear woman, here beside you is now your son in my *new* family together.” Then further sharing with John, “Here is your *new* mother, whom I entrust to you in my family together.” From that time on, John embraces her into his home as his very own—belonging together in Jesus' family and thus never to be relational orphans.

This interpersonal outcome is the precedence for the church family he embodies. And what he embodied is inseparable from the who of his person and the how of his function. Therefore, his church family should not be confused for or conflated with merely membership joining a church. Anything less than his interpersonal outcome enables a gathering of relational orphans.

Jesus' love for his followers is incomplete until it enacts his interpersonal outcome as his own family together. His love, therefore, is distinguished not by mere sacrifice, even on the cross, but by the essential relational process of **family love**. He loves his followers with nothing less and no substitutes for family love. Only on this relational basis is his new commandment to all his followers constituted; and, thus, "Just as I have loved you with family love, in likeness you are to be involved with one another on my basis of family love. As you are relationally involved deeply from your heart, anyone observing this will know that you are my disciples in your whole identity and function." Accordingly, "just on the whole basis of my family love, you are to be my embodied witnesses testifying to the experiential truth and relational reality of the good news of my interpersonal outcome for all the world to receive."

For his interpersonal outcome to keep unfolding for his followers in their identity (ontology) and function, Jesus supports them with his formative family prayer (also considered his high priestly prayer, Jn 17). Sharing his heart fully with his Father in the wholeness of their relationship together—the wholeness of their ontology and function as persons belonging together as One, heart to heart—Jesus prays for the formation of his family to be from inner out, distinguished uncommon from the common surrounding them, thus "just as I am distinguished from it." His feelings shared with his Father flow freely to witness to the depth of their oneness together—as will be verified in his personal outcomes. And on the essential basis of their whole ontology and function, "you, Father, sent me into the world" so "that all of my followers will belong together with us as one in our relational likeness," and thereby "intimately be with me where I am, in order that the love you, Father, have for me may also be in them and that my person will be inseparably in them."

As this interpersonal outcome unfolds in them, on this basis alone "I send them into the world, just as you sent me." This relational process is critical for his interpersonal outcome to propagate, "so that the world may believe you sent me and witness the relational reality that you, Father, have loved my followers just as you have loved me."

His formative family prayer ongoingly remains at the heart of his interpersonal outcomes—the heart of his person constituting the whole of God in his personal outcomes. As this affective narrative shifts to his personal outcomes, his interpersonal outcomes don't cease but are always integrally interrelated. Notably, his personal outcomes will help clarify any illusions and correct any simulations his followers may have about his interpersonal outcomes. Most important, his personal outcomes unfold always directly correlated to his intimate interaction with the Father (as his prayer above reveals) and his ongoing involvement with the Spirit. Yet, his person will be distinct from them—with one personal outcome leaving him disconnected in a moment of mystery on the cross.

His Personal Outcomes

Jesus' life on earth embodies his personal outcomes that reveal the ontology (identity) of *who* and *what* he is, whom he always enacts by *how* he is to determine his personal outcomes. Each and every outcome, personal and interpersonal, in his life are all inseparable from who, what and how he is, because they are based on his righteousness—that is, the whole of who, what and how he is, whose integrity can always be counted on to be nothing less than *who* and *what* and no substitutes for *how*, thereby to embody and enact the ontology and function of the whole of God. Therefore, only the heart of his whole person integrally encompasses, conjoins, integrates and unifies the Jesus seen, heard, claimed and proclaimed; and anything less and any substitutes reconstitutes his person and revises his gospel from their wholeness.

“In the beginning, before the universe and all of created life, existed the Word, who was together with God because the Word was God—an integral person of the whole of God. Accordingly, through him all things were created, and apart from him not one thing came into being. What came into being in him was life in its qualitative significance, not merely its quantitative existence, which was the light illuminated for all humankind. Yet, even though this light shines in the human context of darkness, those in the darkness have not understood it—despite the existential reality of the light overcoming the darkness.

“The Word became embodied in the world for him to enact the relational context and process of God as the essential basis for his personal outcomes. An initial summary of his personal outcomes flows variably from his interpersonal outcomes as follows:

1. Though he came vulnerably to God's own people, his own people did not accept him, or
2. To all who embraced him and trusted his person heart to heart, he enacted their redemptive change to belong in God's family as his very own children—persons born anew, not born of natural descent, nor of human will and means, but born new only by God.”

Therefore, his personal outcomes that will unfold in his affective narrative will be inclusive of the spectrum of feelings in his heart, including the range of negative feelings that he makes vulnerable and never harbors in his heart. Anything less will diminish his person and fragment his outcomes, both personal and interpersonal, from their intrinsic wholeness embodying and enacting God.

There is a vital distinction needing to be made, especially by those engaged in the theological task at any level. There is an ironic difference between the Word and the

Bible; the use of the latter has evolved to diminish his person and fragment his outcomes. The Word embodied and enacted the whole of God in God's essential relational context and process, by which God's ontology and function were vulnerably revealed face to face, person to person, heart to heart for the sole relational purpose and outcome of relationship together in wholeness. Only on this relational basis did the Word constitute his gospel, by which he communicated the Word of God just by relational language to compose the relational terms necessary for belonging in covenant relationship together. His outcomes are contained in the Bible. However, when the Word is not received and understood in his relational language and terms, all this content becomes merely information about God composed in referential language for its transmission. Because of this, the Bible has become this reference book about God that many Christian identity with in their faith and use for their theology and practice, whereby the Word's relational outcomes become effectively elusive, with the relational consequence of gatherings as relational orphans, even with good intentions in adhering to the Bible without embracing or even understanding the Word's relational promise "I will not leave you as relational orphans." Moreover, the Word as the light of life has also eluded many, thereby putting their theology in a theological fog and blurring their vision in their practice.

The Word, however, continues to live today only by the incarnation principle measure of nothing less and no substitutes. In other words, when the historical epochs of the Bible are transmitted by referential language, the Word and his outcomes become variably shaped by what prevails in the surrounding context; the invariable consequence reduces his whole person and reimagines the heart of his outcomes to a quantitative aspect from outer in. Thus, no matter how much the Bible is engaged for our theology and practice, we should neither assume nor confuse that engagement with the relational involvement directly with the Word from and therefore of God. Any questions? Ask the Word, not the Bible.

"No one has ever seen God. But the one and only Son, who is himself God and is intimately one with the Father heart to heart, his person has revealed the Father vulnerably to be known by others in intimate relationship together also heart to heart." This relational outcome constitutes the unfathomable depth of his personal outcome, which he shares intimately with the Father for his interpersonal outcome to be the relational reality of their family together: "I have revealed (*phaneroo*) your being in relational language to those whom you gave me from the world...that they may have eternal life. And this alone is eternal life, that they may intimately know you from inner out, as well as my whole person whom you have sent."

His personal outcome is inseparably integrated with this interpersonal outcome, because his qualitative function always involves the relational process and outcome of *phaneroo*—whereas *apokalypto* is a quantitative process limited only to the object

revealed. *Apokalypto* is what the Bible effectively reveals in contrast to the *phaneroo* magnified by the Word. Therefore, the Word's personal outcome continues ongoingly, "I have made you known in your relational language, and I will keep being relationally involved with them for the deepest outcomes so that the love you have for me may also be their experiential truth and relational reality, and that my person will always be involved with them heart to heart...and thus that they together may be one just as we, Father, are one together with the Spirit."

His unique incarnation initiated the relational process of his earthly personal outcomes. Even as a baby, his heart is conscious of his person and thus aware of those involved with him. As his conscious awareness develops, his person at age twelve enacts the relational purpose that his Father had for him. Contrary to his parents' wishes for him, he goes to the temple by himself and engages the teachers in the theological task. They are simply amazed by his theological understanding, in contrast to their lack due to what amounts to theological fog. But his parents are conflicted with his person's function. Therefore, he clarifies for them the identity and function of his whole person underlying his personal outcome, "Why were you searching for me? Didn't you know that it was necessary for my to be in my Father's house in order to fulfill his purpose for sending me into the world?"

As Jesus continues as an adult to fulfill his Father's purpose, his personal outcomes are taking their toll on him and burden his heart to the point where he no longer wants to enact his purpose. The stress from knowing the outcome he will soon endure, drives him to a garden in Gethsemane. In an intimate moment with his disciples, he shares, "My heart is deeply grieved, overwhelmed to the point of death." It is understandable that the disciples could not be empathetic with what is on his heart, because no human has ever faced what he is about to go through. Yet, his disciples could be sympathetic to him if they made their hearts vulnerable to his feelings. That outcome doesn't occur at this time, which sadly hurts him, adding to his heavy heart.

Feeling the anxiety and fear of the personal outcome soon to happen to him, he then vulnerably pours out his feelings to his Father, the only one who could empathize with his heart, "My Father, if it is possible, let this outcome be removed from me." No doubt, Jesus knows that his Father receives him in his feelings, but intellectually he already knows what his Father wants. Having shared the most vulnerable feelings in his heart, Jesus unequivocally affirms the priority of his Father's will and his commitment to fulfill it, whatever the cost. Accordingly, his personal outcome is fulfilled, so that his interpersonal outcomes will also be fulfilled—with one exceptional outcome that is beyond human comprehension.

<p>The Gethsemane outcome enacts the heart of his whole person in vulnerable function. His vulnerable function communicates to his followers: (1) the whole person to "follow me," and (2) his vulnerable function of "where I am" whereby "his followers will also be</p>
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in their function” (Jn 12:26). This is definitive, thus irreducible and nonnegotiable, for the inner-out identity of his followers’ person and their function—the identity and function in full likeness to his, which (3) embodies nothing less than the wholeness of God (“my peace I give to you,” Jn 14:27) and (4) enacts no substitutes for the vulnerable relational involvement of love “just as I have loved you” (Jn 13:24). In other words, the sheep follow who, what and how the Shepherd communicates, because they know his voice and he knows them by heart. Yet, unlike sheep that merely follow a shepherd by rote function, Jesus’ followers in his likeness must function with the corresponding sentience expressing the heart of his whole person—function which can’t be duplicated even by the progress of AI, however advanced its outcomes.

The exceptional outcome beyond human comprehension happens on the cross. Jesus knows the cost and willfully pays the cost in this outcome. Nevertheless, when it happens, his heart cries out his emotional pain that far exceeds his physical pain: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”—bringing his personal outcome to a consequential relational outcome that in effect fragments the whole of God’s oneness, as if God rejected God. This mystery is beyond any theological understanding, but the relational dynamics cannot be ignored, much less be denied. His cost, therefore, cannot be measured by mere sacrifice, nor by any human terms.

How his outcome on the cross is perceived is variable to those who witnessed it—and will continue to be variable for those who hear or read about it. Before his outcome “is finished,” the two criminals crucified alongside of him demonstrate either a common biased perception of Jesus, or an uncommon essential perception. One only sees Jesus from outer in and just wants his outcome for his self-concern and self-interest. The other perceives the heart of Jesus’ whole person and responds to him person to person to claim his outcome heart to heart. Based on these two perceptions, Jesus’ outcome continues to be claimed either as merely a so-called gospel, or solely as his gospel. His is the good news composed necessarily by his relational language and constituted solely by the heart of his whole person. Indeed, “it is finished!”

And the measure of Jesus used will be the Jesus you get. On the basis of the measure of Jesus you get will be the outcome you get. Then the measure of his outcome you get will determine the gospel you get. Therefore, the measure of the gospel you claim will be the outcome you have for yourself, nothing more no matter how good your intentions. Furthermore, just as Jesus made paradigmatic (Mk 4:24) about the measures used for faith, and its theology and practice, the outcomes (both personal and interpersonal) for those involved heart to heart will increase, while for others they will decrease. This existential equation is unavoidable for the outcomes in everyday life.

Thus, his outcome finished on the cross is not the end—except for the old dying with him—but the beginning of the experiential truth and relational reality of the *new*, which rises with him for the outcomes that he together with the Spirit will continue to

unfold only in nothing less and no substitutes for the wholeness of persons and relationships together in their likeness as God's family—face to face, person to person, heart to heart. Outcomes of anything less are not from “the Light of all life” but from some competing source, and may even include gaslighting.

This narrative awaits the completion of his personal outcomes integrally integrated with his interpersonal outcomes. “Whoever wants to be involved with me in this relational process must follow my whole person with their heart; and where the heart of my person is, their person will also be together heart to heart!” For his outcomes to be completed in a narrative as our existential outcomes, and not merely as history, is contingent on his relational terms.

Contrary to common practice, the contingency of his relational terms is nonnegotiable, even though it is subjected to ongoing bias of variable perceptions and terms. This prevailing condition among Christians and churches causes conflict as the measured used, whereby many become engaged in competing narratives, not completing ones.

Chapter 5 **Completing or Competing Narratives**

**“As you complete my outcomes...take to heart, I am with you always,
so you will never be relational orphans to the end of the age.”**

Matthew 28:19-20

**“You have disengaged from the relational involvement of love
that was your relational reality at first.”**

Revelations 2:4

The profiles of Jesus displayed by Christians in the world today are being challenged by many who witness them. Their objections speak to the underlying issue about Christians portraying Jesus based on extrinsic portraits over intrinsic profiles, and thus rendered more in their own likeness than his likeness. Consequently, the bias of these variable profiles displayed and/or proclaimed by their faith lacks the essential significance of his whole person. Therefore, Jesus himself would not only challenge these Christians but confront them at the heart of their faith.

The affective narrative of Jesus’ feelings can easily be perceived as portraying his human dimension embodied by the incarnation. This is not only a misleading assumption but also limits and constrains his person to the bias of human lenses. Jesus’ feelings are also God’s feelings, whose heart was vulnerably embodied, revealed and enacted, which is the only basis for the heart of human persons to be in his, God’s likeness. Thus, in his post-ascension narrative, the heart of his whole person continues to be vulnerably expressing God’s feelings.

His Post-Ascension Narrative

What unfolds continues to be the affective narrative of his person, which he enacts after his ascension in this vulnerable extension of his heart involvement—his ongoing involvement that either supports those functioning with heart level involvement in a completing narrative, or critiques those engaged in a competing narrative. This either-or process can be overtly explicit, indirect, or simply implied.

The first recorded appearance Jesus makes is an interaction with a person whom he pursues to both critique and support. In a vulnerable connection Jesus pours out his pain, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?” Jesus takes personally in his heart all the counter-efforts Saul engaged against his followers. So, when Saul asks, “Who are you?” Jesus shares his heart to correct him, “I am Jesus, whom you are countering to negate in your competing narrative.” But, then, on the other hand, with no other apparent explanation except for the grace of God, Jesus implies his forgiveness of Saul and implicitly sets him on a new path for his life. This pivotal juncture will be transforming for Saul, whereby he will undergo the redemptive change from his *old* competing narrative to rise up in the *new* completing narrative. In explicit support of Saul’s turnaround, Jesus communicates directly with a disciple named Ananias and unequivocally directs him to support Saul’s transformation. Even though this baffled Ananias, who knew of Saul’s competitive narrative, he fulfills the desires of Jesus’ heart, so that Saul will have the support needed to be a key person completing Jesus’ outcomes.

Saul’s sudden and quick turnaround has the appearance of a mere miracle by Jesus’ touch, but the process of Saul undergoing redemptive change should not be underestimated, much less overlooked. Jesus didn’t have unrealistic expectations of Paul but realistic assurance of his own outcomes.

Redemptive change is a struggle for Jesus’ disciples. For example, the early church is inequitable because it maintains traditions that treat persons unequally. Peter is at the center of this fragmenting process, since he hangs onto remnants of the old defining his identity and determining his function that makes outer-in distinctions among persons. Thus, as a relational extension of his last heartfelt interaction with Peter (“Do you love me?”), Jesus deeply intervenes on his and the church’s competing narrative to facilitate their redemptive change. His words firmly communicated to Peter seem indirect, but they clearly imply that Peter didn’t listen to Jesus’ teaching about what is clean or unclean. The old in Peter and the majority of the church, however, assert their biased lens shaped by their tradition and culture of such distinction-making. And Peter has to change in order to take the lead to bring this change to the church. Since God makes no distinctions of and between persons, anyone who does engages a competitive process that counters Jesus’ outcomes, not helps complete them.

Jesus’ intervention helps Peter change on the theological level, but on the emotional level he still struggles—with relational consequences for Jesus’ gospel, for which Paul later confronts Peter and others joining him, to change at their heart level. It now becomes apparent that Paul assumes the key function at the epicenter of completing the outcomes of Jesus’ gospel and his church—not a gospel or a church that competes with his, no matter how conservative the theology or innovative the practice. Therefore, those will be outcomes that will dissettle the Jewish people and rock the surrounding Graeco-Roman world.

The remaining interactions of his post-ascension narrative—at least, which are recorded for the Word—concentrate on church (Rev 2-3). Jesus expands on his formative family prayer (Jn 17) to clarify the ecclesiology necessary for his church to be whole in God’s likeness. As the early global church forms, there are seven representative churches that Jesus, together with the Spirit, address either in their support or critique. Out of the seven, only two are involved in a completing narrative that warranted Jesus’ support. But the large majority of churches are diversely engaged in a competing narrative, the diversity of which misrepresents his gospel and thus counters his outcomes—churches even with the best of intentions. Under these conditions, Jesus confronts their practice and corrects their theology, the theology and practice which rendered these churches subtly to a competing narrative.

With his direct relational response Jesus integrates the theological framework for **globecclesiology** with the essential relational work to make whole his church family *in* the world but not *of* the world. The outcomes from this segment of his post-ascension narrative will be the basis for any future unrecorded interactions Jesus will have in supporting those involved in completing narratives, and in critiquing those engaged in competing narratives.

The churches critiqued by Jesus each vary in their ways, and it is important to know their surrounding contexts in order to understand for what Jesus holds them accountable. Moreover, underlying their diverse ways is a common function that determines why and how they operate in a competing narrative. And the Word, who communicates explicitly to churches here and indirectly to its leaders, will continue to resonate for churches in the future—notably today, similarly encompassing the majority composing the global church.

Each of these churches is notable for its own variation of church practice, which parallel church practices today. An underlying issue, however, common to these churches emerges in Jesus’ correction of them: the referentialization of the Word from God’s whole relational terms (composing Jesus’ theological trajectory and relational path) to referential terms. In its common mode, referentialization of the Word involves a narrowing-down process resulting in an incomplete, selective or otherwise distorted view of the Word—for example, not closely listening to the Word discussed above, notably his defining prayer for his church family—which then reshapes his theological trajectory and fragments his relational path that compose a competing narrative. One of the common theological consequences of fragmenting the Word is substituting a hybrid theology for whole theology; and this further results in related consequences of fragmenting practice by substituting hybrid practice for whole practice.

A hybrid process emerges clearly in the church in Thyatira (Rev 2:18-19). Thyatira’s economy emphasized trades (including brass-working) and crafts (cf. Acts 16:14). In the Greco-Roman world of that time, trade guilds organized the various trades and were necessary to belong to if one wanted to pursue a trade (much like unions today).

These guilds served various social functions as well, one of which was to meet for common meals dedicated to their patron deities, thereby engaging in activities of pagan worship and immorality. For Christians not to belong to a guild and participate would generally mean becoming isolated economically and socially.¹ The economic structure of this church's surrounding context shaped them to take an apparent pragmatic approach to their practice of faith, rather than become isolated economically and socially.

In the nature of this surrounding context, Jesus acknowledges this church's extensive Christian practice: love, faith, service, patient endurance, and that their "last works are greater than the first," indicating not a status-quo church but actually performing more practice than before. Yet, what Jesus clarifies and corrects are that their practice also "tolerated" (*aphiemi*, to let pass, permit, allow, v.20) a prevailing teaching and practice from the surrounding context (likely related to trade-guilds), which compromised the integrity of whole theology and practice. Significantly, their hybrid process is not simply an issue about syncretism, synthesizing competing ideologies, or even pluralism; and the issue also goes beyond merely maintaining doctrinal purity (as another church will soon demonstrate) to the deeper issue about participation in (*en*) a surrounding context having the prevailing presence of reductionism and its subsequent influence on their perceptual-interpretive lens. Their lens, of course, determines what they ignore (or tolerate) and pay attention to, which shapes their practice in a hybrid process (like the church in Pergamum, (2:12-17).

Theologically, the Thyatira church demonstrates a weak view of sin, that is, sin without reductionism, consequently what they certainly must have considered good works is 'good without wholeness'. Functionally, this exposes their lack of reciprocal relational involvement with God in the indispensable "out of the world-into the world" (*ek-eis*) reciprocating dynamic necessary to distinguish their whole identity as God's family in the surrounding context without being fragmented by it in a hybrid process. What converges in a hybrid process is critical to listen to carefully and pay attention to closely: 'sin without reductionism' subtly composes 'good without wholeness', so that the church's theology and practice are not distinguished whole in the world—though perhaps having longstanding, popular or uncompromising distinction in the surrounding context (as other churches demonstrated), which does not impress Jesus.

To what extent does a hybrid process shape the global church today? Added attention needs to be paid to global South churches, who must adapt to a global economy, fixed cultural traditions, and even the spirit world. Yet, common practices by global North churches already demonstrate having absorbed the limits and constraints from the common into their theology and practice, although the hybrid process is much more subtle.

¹ For further contextual information, see Bruce J. Malina and John J. Pilch, *Social-Science Commentary on the Book of Revelation* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2000).

The influence of reductionism is usually more subtle than witnessed in the Thyatira church, as becomes evident increasingly in the other churches Jesus addresses. The subtlety should not be lost to us because the recurring issues Jesus clarifies and corrects also penetrate deeper into the global church today.

Next is the church in Laodicea (Rev 3:14-22), perhaps the most recognized of these churches due to familiarity of key words by Jesus: “you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot... Listen! I am standing at the door knocking.” Now his words need to be heard in this church’s full context.

Laodicea’s water supply was unique—hot water piped in from hot springs and cold water trenched in from the mountains—yet what characterizes this church is how *common* it was. Western churches, notably in the U.S., need to pay added attention here. This is a rich city known as a prosperous banking center, for its textile industry and its renowned medical school—cultivating great pride by their residents in their financial wealth, fine clothes and famous eye salve. The church there isn’t isolated from this context but shaped by these secondary substitutes for the primary. The state of the church reports this self-assessment: “I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing” (v.17). Whether or not they consider themselves “hot” as a church, they certainly thought they are a good church compared to a “cold” church. It is unlikely that anyone would consider them “not good,” particularly in comparative church history. In prevalent ecclesiastical terms, they are good indeed, yet measured only on the basis of outer-in quantitative terms focused on the secondary (cf. a marketplace). Their narrow lens and fragmentary basis reflect how they define persons from outer in by what they did and possessed, which signify how they engage each other in relationships, thereby determining the basis for how they practice church. Underlying their practices is a theological anthropology of reduced ontology and function—subtle but common theology and practice of most churches. This is the fragmentary condition that the embodied Word (in and from the beginning) clarifies and corrects to expose the true state of their church from inner out in qualitative relational terms, the reality of which composes an inconvenient truth for the church: “You do not realize that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind and naked,” which certainly then is “not good”—even by common comparative terms.

The strength of Jesus’ feedback—which doesn’t appear to be loving or, at least, irenic—is necessary to penetrate their self-assessment illusion shaped by reductionism and to expose their functional simulation with substitutes composed by reductionism. Since they are not paying attention to reductionism, he strongly reminds them that “the measure they were using was the measure they were getting,” and that they could neither boast of nor even hope for having anything more. Just as their water supply turned lukewarm by the time it reached the city and was an inconvenience to their lifestyle, the reality for this church is the condition of being lukewarm. For Jesus, their lukewarm church practice is not only inconvenient but distasteful—if you’ve ever had lukewarm water on a hot day—“I am about to spit you out of my mouth.”

Even if they were “cold,” at least they wouldn’t operate the church with illusions. Lukewarm, however, is a subtle practice from reductionism that promotes the status quo; it signifies what is *common* in the surrounding context and serves to maintain the status quo of the common—with no thought, desire or need to be distinguished as the uncommon in likeness of Jesus. In other words, this church embodied the common theology and practice that what’s good (or at least OK) for the church is ‘good without wholeness’; and it maintains this illusion because it only acknowledges any sin as ‘sin without reductionism’, while ignoring ‘sin as reductionism’ of their persons, relationships and thus church under the assumption that they are not reduced or fragmented. Does this explain Jesus’ feelings of “spit you out of my mouth”?

Moreover, and this is crucial today for the global church to listen and pay attention to, the prevailing reality is that the Internet and social media have amplified the comparative process to compose “virtual good.” And these pervasive messages and referential information subtly both shape our lens and thinking as well as construct illusions and simulations in our practice. Churches (including the global South) are neither isolated nor immune from this globalized comparative system. Think about all the church and academy websites, and remember the early disciples primary concern for “which of them is the greatest.” How much does this create a consumer mentality promoting consumer products to feed our consumption of what’s good? Therefore, since Christians and churches are exposed to and participate in this comparative process, we cannot assume any longer that “we are not and will not be reduced or fragmented.”

What Jesus found in the Laodicean church he continues to find common in churches today. As we listen to the Word and to reductionism, we also need to listen to him pursuing us at the door of our hearts (3:20). His family love seeks for his family to be uncommonly whole together in likeness of the whole and uncommon God, which is irreducible to anything less and nonnegotiable with any substitutes—notably prevalent in the surrounding contexts. The classic image of Jesus knocking at the door is a metaphor of his deep desires and the redemptive change needed for this relational outcome—a metaphor relationally directed less to the individual (as is Christian convention) and more to his church family, the full context for ecclesiology to be whole.

The pervasive influences of reductionism in churches is to be expected when they don’t pay close attention to their theology and practice shaped by ‘good without wholeness’ and ignore the presence in their midst of sin as reductionism. The convenient alternative assumed in theology and practice—which readily provides a rationale for this to continue, even develop into traditions—is some hybrid. This is the subtle challenge unfolding from reductionism that continues to be engaged with increasing subtlety. Two other churches demonstrated an increased subtlety in their theology and practice, which listening to the Word will help us understand the dynamic of reductionism and its counter-relational workings even in our prominent churches that, comparatively speaking, put lukewarm churches to shame.

The next church is in Sardis (Rev 3:1-3). They have “a name, *reputation, brand* [*onoma*] of being alive” apparently in the prevailing perception surrounding them, even though this city hosts many pagan cults whose practices pervaded the surrounding context. The implication here, which we need to understand fully, is that this church lives behind their name, reputation, brand, that is, *onoma* is used as the substitute for what a person (in this case church) actually is. A popular name or brand, for example, is highly respected and has a strong reputation (perhaps even appeal) in the surrounding context, which in a diverse context like Sardis commanded even more acclaim. Yet, does this *onoma* actually represent what the church *is*, or merely represent what the church hopes to be, hopes to achieve in the surrounding context or even hopes to claim in their comparative system? That is to say, does their *onoma* in reality become a reductionist substitute for what the church actually needs to be?

Jesus simply isn't impressed by their practice and makes no such assumptions about them being alive in their ontology and function. Rather he examines how they function, that is, examines in relational terms through his qualitative whole lens penetrating inner out with family love. Though he is subjected to reductionism yet not determined by the influence of the surrounding bias perceiving this church—which is important for us to distinguish in our church assessments—Jesus then exposes what actually exists beneath the outer layer (and *onoma*) of “being alive”: the simple, if not inconvenient, truth is, “*contrary to your esteemed identity, you are dead*” (*nekros*, the condition of being separated from the source of life, thus being unaccompanied by something, i.e. “to be apart”); this reality based on the fact that “I have not found your *practice* complete [*pleroo*] in the sight of my God”; that is, their *ergon* (works denoting what defines them) is incomplete (contrary to *pleroo*, to make full, complete or whole) and fragmentary based on God's whole terms, not as defined by the surrounding context. This church assumes that ‘the measure they used’ for their ecclesiology and practice would not reduce or fragment their ontology and function; yet the often-ignored subtle reality is that such a consequence is ‘the measure they got’—just as Jesus earlier made axiomatic as well as paradigmatic (Mk 4:24).

Is there also something more specific missing in their church practice that we can understand? Unlikely if we are listening only in referential terms, yet there is indeed in relational terms. Since no explicit sins such as idol worship and sexual immorality are mentioned (as in Thyatira), their incomplete deeds point to something more subtle or lacking. Their activity is perceived as alive, yet likely in the quantitative aspects of *bios*, not the qualitative function of *zoe*. Their reputation signifies only a substitute (*onoma*) of the integral identity of who, what and how Jesus' church is, consequently lacks the integrity of wholeness. While Jesus' polemic about soiled and white (*leukos*, bright, gleaming) clothes describes those incomplete and a remnant who aren't incomplete respectively, bright clothes symbolized those who participate in God's life (3:4). This is

about reciprocal relationship and involvement together, which soiled clothes symbolizes a barrier to, precludes or maintains with relational distance. Any type of “soiled” clothes—whether stained by blatant sin or dirtied from subtle incomplete work, including preoccupation with the secondary—would have this relational consequence.

What this more subtly indicates is the lack or absence of ongoing involvement in the ‘out of the world-into the world’ (*ek-eis*) relational dynamic that Jesus made the relational imperative for his church family to be distinguished in the surrounding contexts of the world (Jesus’ definitive family prayer, Jn 17)—distinguished in their whole and uncommon identity from the common and fragmentary surrounding them. Without this relational outcome from the *ek-eis* relational dynamic, this church became subject to the shaping influence of reductionism with the following consequences:

Therefore, they were unable to distinguish being whole from reductionist substitutes in their practice, which emerged from subtly renegotiating God’s whole relational terms down to their terms, thereby submitting to a comparative process measured by ‘good without wholeness’, which composed their illusion and simulation of being alive, unable to perceive that “you are reduced and fragmented,” which rendered them to reflect, reinforce and sustain the human condition “not good to be apart,” leaving them to know only ‘sin without reductionism’—the biased knowledge of good and evil too many churches are subject to and thus shaped by.

It seems incongruent that this highly esteemed church is so incomplete. Their practice obviously wasn’t lukewarm to reflect a status-quo church as in Laodicea. Yet, the subtle self-contradiction is that what often appears compatible to Christ’s church (known early as the Way) is in reality not congruent with the trajectory of Jesus’ relational path embodying God’s whole relational terms (cf. Mt 7:22-23). Being complete and whole and not reduced or fragmented has been an ongoing issue in church history, with recurring issues facing the global church today. Yet, the issue of not being complete or being whole started back at creation and the purpose to “fill the earth” (Gen 1:28). The Hebrew term for “fill” (*male*) generally denotes completion of something that was unfinished. When God declared “it is not good for human persons to be apart,” God started, with Adam and Eve, the relational context and process of the function to be God’s family. This was later fulfilled by Jesus—as he declared “I will not leave you as relational orphans” and sent us the Spirit for completion of his interpersonal outcomes—in the trinitarian relational context of family by the trinitarian relational process of family love. This relational context and process of God’s family were not the primary function of the Sardis church’s involvement and ministry, so Jesus critiques what they “filled their church” with, as he does all churches—critiquing, not supporting, churches engaged in a competing narrative.

In spite of how well the Sardis church presented itself (its appearance) and how well it was perceived (its image), qualitative substance was lacking. This reflected a shift in how they defined themselves from the inner out to the outer-in aspects and functions (*metaschematizo*, change outward form). Their lack of deeper qualitative substance exposed the credibility of their reputation as essentially meaningless—though worth an image in comparative reductionists terms—while the validity of their work (apparent service and ministry) was relationally insignificant because they were separated (“to be apart”) from the substance primary to wholeness of life.

Some may say that these are severe critiques Jesus made of a church that at least was doing something to earn that reputation of being alive—unlike the Laodicean church’s lukewarmness. The choice essentially of style over substance is not unique to the church in Sardis. In fact, the distinction between style (for appearance and image) and substance is blurred in many current church practices. Yet, the credibility gap between what appears to be and what actually exists is not readily apparent to a church and observers, when a church relies on what it does to define itself. Reputation becomes one of those valued indicators of success that many churches depend on for feedback to evaluate their work—or value to validate their position in God’s kingdom. Jesus asks, “What are we filling our churches with?” The above is not the dynamic of *pleroo* (making complete, whole) that distinguishes the *pleroma* (fullness, i.e. whole) of Christ (as Paul illuminated for the church’s wholeness, Eph 1:23).

Jesus’ family love functions for the integrity of relationship together to be whole, and for accountability for anything less and any substitutes. Thus, Jesus’ critiques are ‘a critique of hope’ in his call to be whole—a functional key in his involvement for ecclesiology to be God’s whole family. When Jesus confronted them to “wake up,” the sense of this two-word combination (*gregoreuo* and *ginomai*, v.2) is to emerge as new, whole persons. This was not about self-determination but redemptive change—the relational imperative for transformation. They needed to be transformed in the inner-out aspects and functions (*metamorphoo*, the inward change of transformation) of the person and relationships, while being redeemed from the outer-in aspects and functions (*metaschematizo*) that does not give full importance to the qualitative function of the whole person (signified only by the heart) and the primacy of relationships together in likeness of “my God.” Their outer-in over inner-out way of defining themselves determined what they paid attention to in how they did relationships and how they practiced church—which were not complete but fragmentary and thus without wholeness. The Father makes it a relational imperative for us to “Listen to him *in his wake-up call.*”

The last church in this majority group is in Ephesus (Rev 2:1-4). It is the first church recorded in Jesus’ critiques yet it summarizes the primary issue underlying the other churches, as well as many others through church history into the present. When

reductionism is not carefully listened to and its counter-relational workings is not closely monitored in its subtlety, there is an increasing loss of qualitative sensitivity and relational awareness.

This loss emerged initially in the primordial garden when persons changed from “naked and were not ashamed” (Gen 2:25) in the primacy of whole relational terms from inner out, to “naked and *covered* themselves” (Gen 3:7) in fragmentary referential terms from outer in. The shift to referential terms from relational terms is often more implicit than in this scene, and thus is easily overlooked if we don’t pay attention in church practice to both the quantitative having the main focus over the qualitative and the secondary having more priority over the primary. The referentialization of the Word is the prime indicator of this shift, resulting in a distinct qualitative insensitivity and relational unawareness of the primacy of relationship together distinguishing God’s family—just as the embodied Word prayed only in relational terms (Jn 17:23,26). The church in Ephesus demonstrates this shift and its relational consequence. As you listen, compare this church with churches today and see if there are recurring issues.

In his post-ascension narrative, Jesus consistently discloses knowing these different churches’ “works” or deeds (*ergon*, what defined them). The list of the Ephesian church’s deeds is impressive: their “toil” (*kopos*, denotes not so much the actual effort but the weariness experienced from that effort); their “endurance” (*hypomone*, endurance as to things and circumstances, in contrast to patience toward persons; signifies character that does not allow losing to circumstances, cf. church in Thyatira); they maintained the doctrinal purity of the church under trying circumstances and did not tolerate falsehood, unlike the Thyatira church and its hybrid theology; they even suffered repercussions for Christ’s name and yet endured the hardships to remain constant in their faith. It seems fair to say that their theological orthodoxy or conservatism appeared uncompromising and spotless, maintaining their integrity in the surrounding context. This list forms a composite picture describing how they are, what they do and are involved in, which essentially is extremely dedicated in major church work, and which can also describe a number of successful churches today.

Jesus knows not merely the information about their deeds but also knows (*oida*) the nature of them, and the extent of their functional significance. It may seem somewhat perplexing that Jesus is not impressed with this church and even feels to the contrary about their church practice: “You have abandoned the love you had at first” (v.4). We may wonder “how can a church so involved in church work abandon its first love?” If this were not Jesus’ own critique, we would easily discount this as a misguided conclusion or uninformed allegation. Yet, his strong critique here for the integrity of his church raises a serious issue of church function, which is crucial to account for in how we practice church ourselves. His critique makes conclusive the very heart of his desires for his church to be whole in relationships together as his family.

The term “abandoned” (*aphiemi*) means to forsake, abandon persons, to leave, let go from oneself or let alone; and this also includes functionally maintaining relational distance even while in close physical proximity or in mutual activity. *Aphiemi* is the same term Jesus used in his promise to “not leave *his followers* orphaned” (Jn 14:18). Connecting these relational messages provides the context and process for the function of ecclesiology to be God’s whole family. In the church context at Ephesus this strongly describes not paying attention to the whole person and not giving primary priority to whole relationship together. They worked hard doing things *for* God but the relational process necessary for their “works” to have functional significance was deemphasized or misplaced in their effort. This often happens as churches develop and the goals of church growth become the priority of church practice. In the process, as the Ephesian church demonstrated, there is a subtle shift in which the *means* become the *end* and its primary purpose for relationship together to be whole is abandoned or made secondary.

As the term *hypomone* for “perseverance” denotes, they were so focused on circumstances and situations such that persons (especially God) unintentionally were ignored in relationship, inadvertently left in relational distance or emotionally forgotten. This is a common relational consequence when secondary matters (such as situations) become the priority over the primacy of relationships. Their *hypomone* was in contrast to the Philadelphian church’s *hypomone*, which was a reciprocal relational response to Jesus’ desire (“you have kept my word”) for relationship together (3:8,10). What distinguished them from the Ephesian church was the latter’s referentialization of the Word. Enduring “for the sake of my name” (2:3) narrowed down “my name” to “name without my person,” that is, apart from relationship together; this namesake issue subtly involved a fragmentary process that either disembodies or de-relationalizes, or both, the Word embodied in only relational terms for only a relational purpose and outcome. By “abandoning” their involvement in relationship together (however unintentional or inadvertent), their focus shifted to their persevering character of not giving in to bad circumstances. Thus, their endurance for the sake of “name without my person” also stands in contrast to *makrothymia*, which is patience, endurance, longsuffering with respect to persons; the former is about dedication in hard work (characteristic of the Ephesian church) while the latter involves relationship with mercy, grace and family love (cf. Mt 18:21-22, Rom 2:4).

Despite what would usually be defined as significant church practice reflecting sound ecclesiology, there was distance in their relationships leaving them in the condition “to be apart,” indicating a well-run orphanage (i.e. an organization substituting for family) that could only simulate ecclesiology of the whole. They did not have the relational involvement of family love, therefore they lacked the only involvement having relational significance to God (cf. Mary’s anointing of Jesus as a priority over ministry to

the poor, Mt 26:8-13, par. Jn 12:1-8). This is further demonstrated by their reduction of the truth to mere doctrinal purity. They forgot that the Truth was vulnerably disclosed only for relationship together on God's terms, which they were effectively redefining on their terms. Essentially, their referential terms reversed the priority order of Jesus' paradigm for serving (Jn 12:26) that clearly defined the first priority of discipleship as intimate involvement in relationship together, not focused first on the work to be done for serving (*diakoneo*). Consequently, they also compromised their identity as the light, which is rooted in their relationship with the Light (Rev 2:5b, cf. Mt 5:14-15); this was also contrary to Paul's relational imperative for the church to "live as children of light" (Eph 5:8).

Jesus exposes unequivocally this church's lack of qualitative sensitivity and relational awareness in their theology and practice. In reality, what unfolded in this church is neither surprising nor unexpected. Since they focused primarily on what they did—indicating their reduced theological anthropology in how they defined themselves—they paid attention to related situations and circumstances and less important issues, while ignoring the primacy of relationship together in family love. Functioning with this perceptual-interpretive framework of a reduced theological anthropology resulted in the relational consequences of forsaking their first love, which reflected the lack of relational involvement in their church practice and signified their renegotiated ecclesiology in narrow referential terms, even with their good intentions as conservatives. This should raise serious concerns for church theology and practice today. Does this mean that such church theology and practice reflects, perhaps reinforces or even sustains, the human condition "to be apart?" Jesus' critique holds them accountable for their competing narrative.

The basic complaint Jesus had against this church is the primary issue facing all churches for defining their ontology and determining how they will function: embracing the whole ontology and relational function of the Trinity, and embodying church practice in likeness of the Trinity's relational ontology, therefore in congruence with and ongoing compatibility to Jesus' defining prayer for his family (Jn 17:20-26). In all that the Ephesian church was doing (which was a lot), they were not directly involved in the relational context and process of the whole and uncommon God and did not function in the context of family and process of family love constituted in the Trinity. They demonstrated a direct correlation between the priority we give relationships and the extent to which we are loving, as defined by relational involvement, not as doing something (like serving others), however dedicated. For Jesus, this correlation is irrefutable for ecclesiology to be whole; "the measure you use will be the measure you get." Whether Jesus' complaint against this church included both their relationship with God and with each other is not clearly indicated in the narrative. Yet we can strongly infer that his feelings included all their relationships, because their primary emphasis on their work reflected the three major issues ongoing in life: (1) how they defined

themselves, which further determined (2) how they did relationships and thus (3) practiced church. These three major issues are always deeply interrelated, and also in integral interaction with the primary issue of the Trinity, thereby together they need to be accounted for in church theology and practice in order to be whole.

The global church today needs to learn from the contradictions in both the Ephesus and Sardis church practices in order to counter reductionism's influence of 'good without wholeness' (and 'virtual good' today) and 'sin without reductionism'—recurring issues throughout church history. What these churches focused on and engaged in were reductionist substitutes for the trinitarian relational context of family and the trinitarian relational process of family love. The relational consequence was to become embedded in ontological simulation and functional illusion, notably (pre)occupied by the secondary over the primary.

Moreover, the relational function of the Trinity cannot be understood in theological propositions nor experienced in church doctrine, even in its purity. By reductionist practice, these churches demonstrated how their practice ("abandoned the love you had at first" 2:4) and their understanding ("a reputation of being alive," 3:1) became *decontextualized* from what was primary, and embedded in human contextualization. In their ironic struggle to remain distinct in a pluralistic Greco-Roman context, the Ephesian church stopped paying attention to the greater context that defined them and distinguished their significance. In their effort to be significant (or popular) in their surrounding context, the Sardis church ignored the primary context that constituted them. That is, they were both shaped by the fragmentary human context. Thus, they were removed, diminished or deemphasized from the relational context and process of the Trinity, and needed to be recontextualized in the relational nature of the Trinity. This is the function of reciprocating contextualization in the *ek-eis* relational involvement that Jesus made imperative to distinguish his family in the ecclesiology to be whole and to make whole. Without this reciprocating relational dynamic, church practice increasingly finds its functional basis only in the surrounding context, in which reductionism prevails.

When a church disembodies the Word embodying the heart of Jesus' whole person to fragmentary parts of his teachings and actions, and also de-relationalizes the Word from Jesus' relational terms composing reciprocal relationship together, then that church disconnects with the whole of Jesus' person (whose ontology integrally includes the Father and Spirit) and thereby becomes relationally uninvolved or distant from the presence and involvement of Jesus' person (and the Trinity) in the primacy of reciprocal relationship together person to person, heart to heart. This unfolding relational consequence (often unrecognized or just ignored) emerges directly from the referentialization of the Word, which renders that church's theology and practice to the shaping influence of the surrounding context. This consequence unfolds since the reciprocating *ek-eis* relational involvement is not engaged to integrally distinguish church identity, purpose and function from beyond merely its position in the common of the

world. Unable to be distinguished beyond referential terms, this shaping influence subtly shifts church theology and practice to a variable hybrid process. This subtle shift encompasses the following:

1. This shift is qualitative, thus cannot be observed in quantitative terms, as the Thyatira church's increased amount of "good deeds" demonstrated and the Laodicean church's wealth, fine clothes and medicine illustrate.
2. This shift is ontological, away from the inner-out whole person, thus cannot be understood by an outer-in identity of personhood, as evidenced by the Sardis church's inability to understand its true condition.
3. This shift is relational, thus cannot be experienced in any other human activity than the primacy of intimate relationships together heart to heart, as signified by the unawareness of the Ephesian church's diminished experience in their level of relational involvement together.

The lack of qualitative sensitivity and relational awareness are prime indicators that a shift has taken place to a hybrid theology and practice.

As long as our perceptual-interpretive framework is reductionist, our lens' view of the qualitative, the ontological and the relational will not discern the extent of the surrounding influences reducing the whole of church practice. The relational demands of grace, however, clarifies for church function that nothing less and no substitutes than to be whole is the only practice that has significance to God. Additionally, the lens of repentance in conjoint function with a strong view of sin makes no assumptions to diminish addressing sin as reductionism, first and foremost within church practice and then in the surrounding contexts. And Jesus wants "all the churches" to clearly "know that I am he who searches hearts and minds" (Rev 2:23)—that is, examines the qualitative significance of persons from inner out, whom he holds accountable for authenticity to be whole in vulnerable heart-to-heart relationships together as the whole of God's family (2:25; 3:11). In their effort to be relevant (and possibly pragmatic) in the surrounding pluralistic context, the Thyatira church forgot in their many admirable church practices what was necessary to be whole and to make whole (cf. a similar error by the church in Pergamum in a reductionist context, Rev 2:12-15).

It is not sufficient for churches to be a mere presence, or even merely to function, in the world; their only significance is to function *eis* (relational movement into) the world both to be relationally involved with others as God's whole and, by the nature of this function, also to confront all sin as reductionism of the whole. Jesus teaches us about the heart of his whole person embodying the church, and the lesson we need to learn from the Thyatira church is: to let pass, indifferently permit or inadvertently allow—"tolerated," which the others also did more subtly—the influence of reductionism in any form from the surrounding context proportionately diminishes the wholeness of church

practice and minimalizes their relational involvement with God, with each other in the church and with others in the world. For churches to get beyond practice merely in the world, they need a different dynamic to define and determine their practice.

By searching hearts Jesus teaches us that church function is about being whole from inner out, not merely doing correct ecclesial practices. And the *eis* relational engagement of church function in the world has to be conjoined with the *ek* (movement out of) the common's influence in order to be relational involvement with the whole of God, as its defining antecedent in the *ek-eis* dynamic. This reciprocating relational process negates the continuous counter-relational work of Satan and its reductionist influence (Rev 2:24) by ongoingly engaging, embracing, experiencing and extending God's whole in the qualitative significance of the integrated ontology of both personhood and the church constituted in and by the Trinity.

Therefore, as long as churches continue to function with their biased lenses focused outer in, their view of the qualitative, the ontological and the relational will not discern the extent of the surrounding influences reducing the whole of church practice. The churches critiqued by Jesus were not unique in church formation; and if we listen to his key words for the church he embodies, those churches cannot be considered exceptions in church history. Each church has at least one counterpart in the contemporary church, which must be taken seriously because of Jesus' critique for his global church family to be whole and uncommon in likeness of the whole and uncommon God:

1. Church at Ephesus—the theologically orthodox, doctrinally correct, or conservative church
2. Church at Sardis—the successful “mega” church, or multisite church
3. Church at Thyatira—the activist, service oriented, or missional church
4. Church at Laodicea—the traditional status-quo church, or consumer church of convenience.

All these churches have in common what continue to be critical recurring interrelated issues needing epistemological clarification and hermeneutical correction: a weak view of sin not including reductionism, an incomplete knowledge of what's *good* (for the church) without including wholeness, and a fragmentary theological anthropology reducing ontology and function from wholeness—all working subtly under the assumption that “we will not be reduced or fragmented” because “we know good and evil.” Therefore, Jesus' key words in whole relational terms are indispensable for the assessment of the global church's condition today, and are irreplaceable for the global

church to be whole. And its wholeness doesn't have to have theological consensus, but it is imperative to constitute relational oneness, as Jesus prayed.

Jesus teaches us a profound lesson that delineates a simple reality of life about the human person and the existing social order—issues we either pay attention to or ignore depending on our working assumptions of humanity and society. Since we do not live in a vacuum, our practice is either shaped by the surrounding context we are in (thus embedded) or constituted by what we enter *eis* that context with. In the latter function, for *eis* to define and determine practice necessitates the *ek* relational involvement to disembed us from a surrounding context in order to embed us to the whole of God's relational context and process, thus constituting God's whole for the *eis* relational movement back. This reciprocating relational process signifies the relational demands of grace compatible with the working assumptions with which Jesus came *eis* the world, and his assumptions of humanity and the existing social order with which he engaged the world.

For our practice both as person and persons together as church, disembedding from the influence of reductionism to re-embed to God's whole is the issue we need to wake up to. Without the function of nothing less and no substitutes, which grace demands for person and church, wholeness is diminished and the whole is minimalized—or functionally not whole. For church practice to fulfill its divine purpose and function, it must account in its function for being relationally embedded in the whole of God and God's trajectory for its globalizing commission “sent to be whole” in conjoint relational function with its “call to be whole and holy” (as Jesus pointed the Thyatira church to, 2:26-29).

Jesus' post-ascension narrative is not merely an addendum for his church. This is what in pre-ascension he vulnerably embodied with nothing less and no substitutes of the whole of God and ongoingly accounted for the whole of God's intimate response for relationship together. After his church had opportunity to establish its practice in his call and commission, his feedback provides in family love the critique of hope necessary for all churches also to embody in its practice the qualitative relational function to be God's whole. Now in deeper reciprocal relational responsibility, his church is ongoingly accountable for God's whole with compatible relational response back. And his post-ascension narrative for completing his outcomes is clearly definitive for his church's response to be whole as God's new family, and for his church to live and make whole as equalizer for God's new relational order. His outcomes constitute church function only in relational congruence with his embodied function as the equalizer in the trinitarian relational context of family by the trinitarian relational process of family, nothing less and no substitutes but God's whole on God's terms.

Who or What Will Compose Our Narrative?

The affective narrative of Jesus' beginnings, trajectories and outcomes ongoingly resonates for those who listen heart to heart to his whole person. However, listening deeply to the Word in his relational language is neither the same nor should be confused with reading the Bible attentively in referential language—just as many Jewish teachers were confronted by Jesus for the insignificance of their studying Scripture. The level of involvement in this distinctive basic process is the open question only you can answer, which will determine who or what will compose your narrative. And the critical issue facing all Christians and churches leads us back, again and again, to the axiom made paradigmatic by the Word: “the measure you use will be the measure you get, nothing more but eventually something less” (Mk 4:24).

Until we examine vulnerably the measures used for our theology and practice, we will not understand or be aware of who or what composes our narrative. This lack of understanding is the consequence of a lens used that lacks the laser focus of the innermost, which then is consequential in having a lack of qualitative sensitivity and relational awareness; and the lack of being aware of the composition of our narrative makes inconceivable being able to distinguish between completing and competing narratives. Christianity in the U.S. struggles in this condition for its witness to be distinguished, for example, simply from partisanship. That's why the measure we use is axiomatic for the measure we get, and subsequently use to get a comparable measure, to further use....

At the close of his recorded post-ascension narrative with his vulnerable heart, Jesus shared his feelings unmistakably so that “all the churches [and their members] will know that I am the one and only who searches hearts as well as minds.” The heart of the person has always been primary for his person, the whole of which he shares vulnerably in his involvement in all relationships. Therefore, the intrinsic profile that fully distinguishes his whole person is illuminated as the Light only by the primary measures (1) of the qualitative from inner out, and (2) of his vulnerable involvement of love (family love) in relationships.

The primacy of these integral measures renders all other portraits of his identity and function secondary at best, and thus nonnegotiable to any of the secondary. Peter's narrative highlighted the secondary in the dimness of his lens, contrary to the Light, and thus with his blurred vision he often competed with Jesus' trajectory and outcomes. What has and will always affect the heart of Jesus' person is whenever the secondary is used as a substitute (intentionally or unintentionally) for the primary, not only to portray his person but also for his followers—the extrinsic portraits of anything less and any

substitutes. Sadly, with disappointment and anger, the heart of Jesus vulnerably keeps witnessing such secondary measures evolve among his followers and their churches to prevail as the primary determining measure for their identity and function in the world—just like the churches he critiqued earlier, and contrary to Paul’s imperative for the only church’s measure to be “the wholeness of Christ” (Col 3:15).

The who and what composing our narrative today are subject to the same influences and measures as in the past. The main influence comes from our surrounding context, which all Christians and churches are subjected to ongoingly; the problem, of course, is when we submit to this influence and thus become subject to it. The overriding and soon overcoming measure revolves on our view of sin. As noted in his post-ascension narrative, a weak view of sin keeps evolving to limit sin to disobedience of God’s commands, and/or frames sin around moral/ethical failure. Lacking is the strong view of sin that encompasses all the choices, efforts, processes and structures that reduce who and what God created and recreated whole in the likeness of God’s wholeness.

The interaction between surrounding influences and our view of sin is evident as follows:

When our view of sin doesn’t center on reductionism, our focus is unable to be aware of the surrounding outer-in influences that both reduce our person and relationships, and thus our lens becomes incapable of discerning the consequences for our person and relationships. Social media is the prevailing example of this reductionist impact.

Such reductionism persists unless exposed in its subtlety and negated in its counter-relational workings. This outcome, however, only unfolds from the direct relational involvement of the heart of Jesus’ whole person in reciprocal relationship together with us person to person, heart to heart.

Just as Jesus’ heart, vulnerable in all his feelings, constituted the presence and involvement of his whole person, he searches our hearts: (1) to examine our view of sin, (2) to see the level of influence from the surrounding contexts, and (3) to know our level of involvement in relationship together. On this innermost basis, it will be clarified: (1a) how our view of sin determines how we live, (2b) what influences the main composition of our existential narrative, and (3c) who is the subject in our narrative that determines who is the principal person defining our identity and constituting our involvement in relationships.

Clarified foremost in our narrative is whether or not “you have kept relational distance from my relational involvement of love that you experienced at first.” It is essential that his relational involvement of love (family love) be our ongoing relational reality heart to heart, so that his outcomes will be our experiential truth in daily life: “I, my whole person, am with you always, so you will never be relational orphans to the end of the age.”

Our narrative continues with who or what...either completing or competing. His affective narrative shares vulnerably the feedback needed to continue with the significance constituted only by his outcomes. And as he shared directly to include those with good intentions in his discipleship paradigm, even “serving me” is neither adequate to be his follower nor sufficient to be his disciple. Therefore, “whoever identifies with me must follow my whole person, as vulnerably revealed in my affective narrative; and where the heart of my person is, there also will be vulnerably involved, the hearts of my followers”—nothing less and no substitutes are definitive for discipleship.

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